

CHAMPAIGN UNIT 4 2009 SCHOOL CLIMATE STUDY – DRAFT REPORT – 12.15.10

A DRAFT Report of Primary Findings of the 2009 School Climate Study for
Champaign Community Unit School District 4

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Executive Summary

Overall, with a few notable and important exceptions, in 2009, school staff perceived the climate of Champaign schools in very positive terms. Parents', middle and high school students' perceptions were generally slightly less positive than those of staff. Their perceptions were typically neutral to negative. Elementary students tended to see the climate more positively than middle and high school students.

Because there were more Whites than African Americans in each sample, the average results for each sample (when race is ignored) tended to look like those of the Whites. However, there were statistically significant differences across race on most perceptions.¹ This was true for staff, parents, middle and high school students. When results were examined separately for Whites and African Americans, significant differences emerged. African Americans saw multiple aspects of the social climate in dramatically more negative terms than did Whites.²

As was true in 2000, in 2009, African Americans saw the social climate in markedly more negative terms than Whites. Differences in perceptions between African Americans and Whites were the rule in Champaign Schools. For all but the elementary student sample where race differences were small, and on a high proportion of all climate dimensions, there were substantial differences across race. On four of the seven dimensions that permitted comparison across samples, White parents had the most favorable view of the climate. On the remaining three dimensions White staff had the most favorable views. On balance, African American high school students had the most negative views followed closely by African American staff then parents.

The most pervasive racial differences occurred among school staff. On 17 of the 21 the climate dimensions measured (81%), African American staff perceived the climate more negatively than their White peers. Parents had the next largest proportion of climate dimensions with differences across race. On 15 of 21 of the climate dimensions measured (71%), African American parents perceived the climate more negatively than their White peers. Fewer, yet numerous, racial differences were found for high school and middle school students (for each group, on six of nine, or 67% of dimensions).

Across samples, the most consistent differences in perceptions appeared on three climate

¹ In this report, all references to differences between racial or other groups index statistically significant differences, i.e., mean differences between groups that are no more likely than 5 in 100 times to have appeared by chance, assuming no real difference in the population ($p < .05$).

² In this report, group differences described as “dramatic,” “large,” or group means labeled “very disparate” refer to differences that were statistically significant and had large effect sizes ($> .8$) as measured by Cohen’s D. Group differences described as “moderate,” “marked,” “substantial,” or group means labeled “disparate” refer to differences that were statistically significant and had moderate effect sizes (between .45 and .8) as measured by Cohen’s D. Group differences described as “small,” or group means labeled “slightly disparate” refer to differences that were statistically significant and had small effect sizes (between .3 and .45) as measured by Cohen’s D.

dimensions: Racial Fairness, Need to Address Racial Issues, and Family Attributions for Misbehavior. Large racial differences were found on each of these dimensions in all four samples in which they were measured (staff, parents and middle and high school students). African American respondents were, depending on sample, between two and four times more likely than their White counterparts to believe the schools are racially unfair and between two and five times more likely to perceive a need to address racial issues. Similarly, across all four samples, Whites were about twice as likely as African Americans to attribute student misbehavior to family causes. There were also large racial differences for both adult samples – staff and parents – on two dimensions of the climate: Consent Decree – Making too much of Race, and Qualities of Desegregated Schools. African American staff were over four times more likely than their White counterparts and African American parents were about three times more likely than their White peers to disagree that the Consent Decree had made too much of race. Similarly, African American parents were over four times more likely than White parents and African American staff over two times more likely to view African American representation in academic programs and among school staff, and the teaching of cultural sensitivity and African American history as very important. Moderate to large racial differences among staff and/or parents also exist in perceptions of Trust and Respect, Belonging, Perceptions of Encouragement of Parent Involvement, Teacher Expectations, Fairness Discipline, Fairness General, Cultural Understanding, Consent Decree – Negative Consequences, School Resource Officers, Need to Talk More about Race, and Need for More Professional Development around Race.

Parallel differences exist across socio-economic class, with students from lower income families consistently tending to perceive the climate more negatively than those from middle and upper income families. However, statistical analyses demonstrate racial differences in perceptions cannot be explained by family income level (nor by students' academic or disciplinary status). Racial differences persist even when analyses controlled for income level and students' academic and disciplinary status.

The most striking finding with respect to change from 2000 to 2009 is how little perceptions have changed. The overall pattern of findings in 2009 is remarkably consistent with the overall pattern of findings from the 2000 survey. The core features of the school climate – influence, trust and respect, fairness, need to address racial issues, cultural understanding, and experiences of racism – have remained quite stable over the nine years between surveys. This is not to say there has been no change, but change has been small in magnitude relative to, and has generally not affected, the overall pattern of generally positive perceptions of White staff and students and considerably more negative (though on many measures still positive) perceptions of African American staff and students.

As was true in 2000, the findings from this study reveal both positive and negative aspects of the perceived social climate of Unit 4 schools.

On the positive side:

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- The majority of all staff, parents and students in the district see the school climate in largely positive terms;
- Neither staff, parents nor students perceive widespread overt or malicious interpersonal racism;
- There is a widespread desire to be fair and to “do right” by all children and families in the district;
- There is evidence that the attention to race brought about by the consent decree has increased the ease with which staff can discuss race;
- There is a bit more support for addressing racial issues, despite overwhelming interest in seeing the consent decree end; and,
- There is considerable support for both past and continued professional development among staff and parents, to assist staff in dealing with the challenges of working with a diverse student population.

On the other hand, there is continued reason for serious concern.

- African American staff, parents and students perceive the climate in markedly more negative terms than do Whites --- often in very negative terms. These findings indicate perceived lack of fairness and cultural understanding that are not, typically, the result of malicious or intentional racism on the part of individual people, but rather are institutionalized in the educational practices and policies of the schools.
- There is evidence that the majority of staff, who inevitably will play central roles in continued efforts to realize racial equity, do not perceive a need for change.
- There remains evidence of considerable resistance to change.

Recommendations:

1. Provide high quality professional development for both academic and nonacademic staff focused on teaching and supporting students of diverse backgrounds well. This training should be:
 - voluntary, targeted to interested participants

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- targeted to specific interests and experience levels of staff
 - organized in a graduated series
 - participants select their own level
 - participants progress through multiple modules over time
 - options with different content foci (e.g., cultural differences as relates to discipline and student behavior, racial identity, cultural sensitivity, privilege and power, whiteness, etc.)
 - designed to engage participants to develop critical perspective
 - designed to build a critical cohort of staff within each building
 - designed for participants to earn board credit tied to salary increases
 - have some modules that permit experiential learning in community settings
 - have some modules that provide coaching / mentoring of teachers as they carry training into their classroom practice
2. Create safe and competent spaces for staff to engage in ongoing discussions of diversity issues (particularly, but not limited to race and racism)
 - one model is learning communities
 - could be organized to make opportunities available for teachers and staff at the individual school building level
 3. Create safe and competent settings for students to express what they are experiencing in schools; these settings should:
 - provide opportunities for students to develop and express voice and resistance
 - acknowledge and honor students' experiences, feelings and history
 - support students to take leadership roles
 - could be located in after school programs and/or student organizations
 4. Collaborate with other organizations (e.g., City of Champaign, community based organizations) to provide opportunities for parent training on race and racial issues in education
 5. Address the culture of distrust (between school building administrators and central administration; between administrators and teachers – need to develop improved communication between building and central administration
 6. Develop and provide elective courses at the high school level that identify and develop venues/opportunities for students to critically engage issues of social history and race. These courses should be for credit course.

7. Engage University of Illinois resources to help address any of these recommendations.
8. Create accountability mechanisms specifying timelines and responsible personnel to mark progress toward the implementation of these recommendations.

Introduction

This report presents the primary findings of the 2009 Champaign School Climate Study. There has long been widespread recognition among educational policy makers, researchers and school personnel that perceived school social climate is important to the health and well being of school children. Research has shown negative school climate perceptions to be associated with students' poor achievement, emotional problems, behavioral difficulties, dropping out, absenteeism and dissatisfaction with school. The purpose of this study was to gather opinions about the perceived social climate of Champaign schools from parents, students, and school staff.

The report is organized into four sections. First, historical background to the study is provided. Next, the study methods are described. The third section describes the primary results. The final section presents interpretations, commentary, and recommendations for addressing issues raised by the survey's results.

Historical Background

The current study is the second School Climate Study for Champaign Community Unit School District 4. The first was conducted in 2000. Both studies followed from legal agreements stemming from the resolution of complaints filed in 1996 by members of the Champaign community with the United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR), on behalf of certain African American students alleging racial disparities in access to Unit 4 school programs and educational outcomes. In August 1996, OCR initiated a pro-active compliance review of minority over-representation in special education and under-representation in upper level courses. OCR also examined other dimensions of within school segregation of students on the basis of race, including student discipline, staff hiring and other issues.

Following the charges filed by the community and OCR's review, the District commissioned a comprehensive education audit to assist the District in determining "...its responsibilities and priorities in ensuring that a quality education be made available equitably to all students."³ The findings of that audit indicated that, among other things, while African American students comprised approximately one third of all students in the district at that time, they represented only about three percent of students in the gifted and talented program, over half of special education students, and nearly two thirds of all suspensions. The audit's findings and recommendations were delivered to and accepted by the Board of Education in the summer of 1998.

³ Education Equity Implementation Plan: "Closing the Achievement Gap", adopted by Champaign Community Unit School District 4 Board of Education, June 12, 2000.

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In September 1998, the District and OCR signed a Resolution Agreement outlining those actions the District should take “...to further its commitment to ensure that African American students are provided equal access to high quality education and rigorous educational standards under the law.”⁴ In this resolution agreement, the District agreed "a school climate which promotes learning and success and encourages students to support each other is essential" in order "to ensure equal access for African American students to its educational programs."⁵ The Agreement mandated:

a district-wide school climate study to determine the extent to which each school in the District offers a learning environment that supports all students and provides maximum opportunities for success. The climate study will include a survey of District parents designed to identify problems with District programs perceived by parents and to understand reasons why parents are not able or choose not to become involved with District activities. The climate study will be conducted with the assistance of recognized experts in the field and will include recommendations for implementing actions deemed necessary to correct any identified deficiencies.⁶

In the summer of 1999, following a public solicitation of proposals by Unit 4, Professor Mark Aber, from the University of Illinois and the principal investigator of the current study, was commissioned to design and conduct the survey. A report of the findings of the 2000 School Climate Study for Champaign Community Unit School District 4 was delivered to and accepted by the Unit 4 Board of Education on February 19, 2001.

In January 2002, the United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois took jurisdiction in the case for the purpose of enforcing the dispute resolution agreed to by the plaintiffs and the Unit 4 School District. Since that time, the court has monitored progress toward implementation of equity related reforms.

In its March, 2007 report to the court concerning its newly revised “Collaboration Plan,” the district agreed to conduct a second climate study. Formal agreement to conduct the study was reached in January 2008. In early October 2008, a team led by Professor Aber responded to a Request for Proposals to conduct the current study. In November 2008, Professor Aber was chosen to conduct the study.

⁴ Ib. Id.

⁵ Resolution Agreement --- Case Number 05975014, page 1.

⁶ Ib. Id., pages 3-4.

Study Methods

Survey Content. As was the case in 2000, this study focused on *perceived* school climate. It did not aim to measure an objective climate. Instead, it emphasized the importance of how individuals and groups *perceive* what happens in their schools. Thus, two children in the same classroom may perceive the classroom climate quite differently depending on their backgrounds and experiences. Such individual differences in perceptions of climate are expected in any organization. Neither child’s perceptions necessarily reflect a unitary objective climate. However, both are *equally valid* perceptions and *equally valid* reflections of the perceived school climate. The decision to focus on perceived climate had two primary motivations. First, perceived school climate has been found in previous research to be associated with student performance and wellness. Second, important group differences in perceptions of climate were anticipated in the Champaign schools.

Because this study followed from concerns regarding documented racial inequities in Champaign schools, particular attention was devoted to examining how race and issues related to race impact school climate. A new school climate survey had to be developed and validated to examine the impact of racial issues on social climate in a public school district, as none existed prior to this study. To capture the unique perspectives of the Champaign community concerning school climate, individual and group meetings were held with representative stakeholders.⁷ Several themes emerged repeatedly in these meetings. These included: the importance of teachers and building administration having high expectations for students, changes in racial inequities during the last 10 years, beliefs about why some students perform poorly, and the importance of parent participation in schools. Suggestions and insights from these meetings were used to develop survey questions. Other questions were based on the investigators’ assessment of relevant issues, four dimensions of racial climate identified in 2000, and parallel questions from nationally validated measures of racial and school climate.

Two issues concerning the survey content bear additional comment. First, it is important to note that while the Champaign School Climate Survey has a significant focus on perceptions of how race matters in school, it is not simply a racial climate survey. Many items on all versions of the survey examine general climate issues. To reduce response bias, on each version of the survey, approximately half of all items were worded negatively and half positively. The specific content of the surveys is described in more detail at the beginning of the results section below. Items used to measure individual climate dimensions can be found in Appendices A through D. Second, it is also important to note that the Champaign community is composed of people from diverse backgrounds. For this reason, some of the questions on the survey ask about “all races.” But, because the OCR agreement focused on the fair treatment of African American

⁷ For example, meetings were held with leaders of community organizations, district- and school-level administrators, representatives of the teachers’ union, the PTA council, the school board, and Champaign students, among others.

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students and families, a number of questions specifically ask about African Americans. The omission of questions specifically focused on other racial groups (e.g. Latino/a, Asians, American Indians, Whites, etc.) was not intended to diminish the importance of their experiences in the school. Space limitations simply did not allow separate questions about each of these groups, but comments concerning the experiences of these groups were encouraged in space provided for such comments on the middle school, high school and adult versions of the survey.

Survey Administration. The survey was administered to all school staff (both teaching and nonteaching) online and via paper and pencil to students (grades 4-12) in the spring 2009. With the cooperation of the Unit 4 Office of Equity and Achievement, each staff member was given a unique URL by the school district to confidentially complete the survey on-line. Staff completed the survey between April 14th and May 8th. Prior to completing the survey, staff was given instructions indicating that they need not answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable answering. They were informed that their secure responses would be sent directly to a password-protected database, only accessible by the primary research staff, and would be kept strictly confidential.

Teachers administered the survey to students in classrooms during regular school hours in late April/early May. A week or so prior to the scheduled date of survey administration, parents received a mailing from the district informing parents of the purpose of the survey, and procedures for administration. Included in this mailing form for parents to sign and return to their child's teacher if they choose to deny permission for their child to participate in the survey. Teachers read the questions aloud while students followed along silently, responding to each question by filling in the appropriate response bubble with a pencil. The survey took approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. Students who did not assent and/or whose parents denied permission were provided a quiet place to work on their homework and/or to read a book of their choosing. There were two versions of the student survey, one for fourth and fifth graders and one for middle and high school students. Teachers were provided detailed instructions in advance of administering the survey to students, and among other things were instructed to inform students about the purpose of the survey, that their participation was voluntary, that they may refuse to answer any question, and that they may decide not to complete the survey at any time without penalty. Teachers were also provided resource materials to help them respond to potential questions or concerns that students might have in response to the potentially provocative nature of some survey content. Teachers were invited to participate in an informational/training meeting prior to administering the survey.

Parent surveys were mailed to the parents or guardians of all students in the Unit 4 School District in the last week of June 2009. A cover letter provided instructions to parents that informed them about the purpose of the survey, that their participation was voluntary, that they may refuse to answer any question, that they may decide not to complete the survey at any time without penalty, and that their responses would be kept strictly confidential. The letter also instructed parents to complete and return the survey in the postage-paid pre-addressed envelope

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provided for that purpose. If parents preferred, they had the option to complete the survey online. Parents were given three weeks to complete the survey. In an effort to maximize parent participation, parent surveys and return envelopes were also made available in several public locations (e.g. the Champaign Public Library, the Douglass Branch Library).

Confidentiality of Responses. All data collected for this study has been and will continue to be kept completely confidential and stored in a secure location, accessible only to the research team. No respondent data will be reported in a way that allows any individual respondent to be identified.

Survey Sample Response Rates. Survey respondents included approximately 78% of 4th and 5th grade students, 69% of middle school students, and 82% of high school students in attendance on the days the surveys were administered in the designated grades (999 completed from 4th and 5th graders, 1254 from middle school students, and 1800 from high school students). In addition approximately 27% of all school building staff (383 completed surveys), and 475 parents completed surveys. It should be noted the rate of response to a survey is not necessarily related to the validity or generalizability of the survey findings, which have more to do with quality of measurement and the similarity/differences between the sample of respondents and those who did not complete the survey. The question of how representative survey participants were of the broader population of staff, parents and students in the district is taken up below.

Students. Overall, the percentage of students who declined to participate in the survey was highest at the elementary level (17%), closely followed by the middle school level (16%). The lowest percentage of students declining to take the survey was at the high school level (9%). Additionally, at the high school level the number of absent students surpassed that of students declining to participate. The most variation in participation rates at the school level was in the elementary schools, though this may be due in part to the large number of schools relative to middle and high schools. At the middle school level, there was a notable difference in participation rates between one school and the other two. Very few students failed to participate due to parent refusal of permission (one to two percent across school levels).

Some variability in participation rates was observed across schools. At the elementary school level, rates of students who declined participation ranged from 8% to 33%. At the middle school level, the rate of students declining participation was 21% at two of the schools and 7% at the third. At the high schools, the rate of students declining participation was 4%, 10% and 19%.

Parents. Four hundred and seventy-five surveys were completed based on 629 students or slightly over 7% of the student population.⁸ With one exception, responses were relatively

⁸ Parents were mailed one survey per household, even if they had more than one child in any given school or children in more than one Unit 4 School. If either of these two conditions applied, parents were asked to complete the survey based on either (a) their combined experiences across all Unit 4 schools their children were currently attending, or, (b) to pick one child and complete the whole survey based that child and his/her current school.

evenly distributed across grade and school. The parents of Centennial students were over-represented in the sample. They comprised 24% of the sample while Centennial students comprise slightly less than 17% of Unit 4 students. Fifty-four parents, or 11.4% of the parent respondents self identified as Black/African American. This percentage is considerably below the percentage of African American families in the school district, which was approximately 37.3% in 2009. Low-income families were also underrepresented in the sample of parent respondents. Just over 16% of parent respondents reported their child(ren) received free or reduced price lunch, compared to 47% in the district as a whole. Two out of three (67%) African American respondents reported that their child(ren) received free or reduced price lunch while only 7.7% of white, and 20.4% of all other parents did so.

Staff. Overall the high schools had the highest rates of participation, followed by the grade schools. The middle schools had the lowest rates. At the high school level, the overall participation rates by school were 29% and 42%. This second figure represents the highest overall participation rate by a school across all grade levels. At the elementary school level, overall staff participation rates by school ranged from 15% to 37%, with an average participation rate of 23%. At the middle school level, overall staff participation rates were very similar by school, ranging from 21% to 24% with an average participation rate of 22%.

By occupation, 31% of all teachers, 56% of certified staff, 38% of administrators, and 15% of support staff took the survey. The patterns of participation rate by occupation across the three school levels were very similar.

The sample of teachers who completed the survey was representative of all teachers in the district on gender and race (in fact they were virtually identical on these characteristics). The sample also appears similar to all teachers in the district in average years of teaching. The average number of years teaching district-wide was 11.6 years. An exact average could not be computed for the sample, but it appears similar to the district average – 5% of the sample reported teaching for less than 1 year, 24% for 1 to 4 years, 23% 5-10 years and 48% for 10 years or more. One characteristic that distinguished teachers who completed the survey from those who did not, was teachers' average level of education. The sample of teachers who completed the survey reported slightly higher average levels of education. Whereas 46% of teachers in the district held bachelor degrees and 54% held masters or higher, only 32% of the sampled teachers were bachelor level and 68% were masters or higher.

The only known sources of non-response among students and staff were absences and refusals to complete the survey due to their own, or, in the case of students, their parents' objections. In both cases, comments received via phone, written notes, and e-mail suggested that the non-responses were disproportionately from students and staff who were positive about the general climate of the schools and who held skeptical or negative views of the Consent Decree. Informal reports from staff suggested that (1) many staff were simply "burnt out" by demands placed on them by the Consent Decree and thus were not interested in participating, (2) the

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timing of the survey toward the end of the school year, and for the high schools immediately following an intense period of standardized testing, led some to not participate, (3) some staff were concerned that they could not trust assurances regarding the confidentiality of their responses and therefore feared possible retribution from school and/or district administration, and (4) some staff did not believe that the findings from the survey would be taken seriously by district administrators and therefore did not invest the time necessary to complete the survey.

It is difficult to assess how the results might have been different had all staff responded, as it is impossible to know the proportion that did not respond for various reasons and each reason is likely to have had a different impact on the results. In any event, the perceptions of such large numbers of students (3153), staff (383) and parents (475) must be given serious consideration.

Results

In this section of the report, the primary survey findings are described. Following an overall summary, findings are presented in the following order: staff and parents, middle and high school, 4th and 5th grade students, differences in perceptions by school, differences in perceptions by race, and changes in climate perceptions from 2000 to 2009.

Social Climate Dimension Scores. Each survey item was designed to measure how participants feel about one of the school climate dimensions defined in Table 1 below. Each dimension was measured by participants' answers to at least two (typically between three and seven) items on the survey.⁹ (See appendices A through D for the specific items used to measure each climate dimension within each sample.) Depending on the dimension measured, each item was rated either for participants' level of agreement, perceived importance, or frequency of occurrence. Scores for each climate dimension were computed for each participant by taking the average of the ratings across the multiple items for each dimension. These scores enable us to report the proportion of each sample that, on average (across items) agreed, was neutral or disagreed with each climate dimension.

Building from the initial climate survey conducted in 2000, with the aim of providing some grounds for comparison over time, efforts were made to measure many of the same aspects of climate in 2009 as were measured in 2000. Eleven of the 21 dimensions measured by the 2009 staff survey were also measured in 2000. Twelve of the 21 dimensions measured by the 2009 parent survey were also measured in 2000. Five of the 9 dimensions measured by the 2009 middle and high school survey were also measured in 2000. The 2009 survey (prompted by themes identified in focus groups designed to update the 2000 measures) included a significant number of new items concerning perceptions of the consent decree and school district efforts to address racial inequities. Efforts were also made to construct items and scales that would allow for comparison of adult and student perceptions. Seven dimensions, five of which were measured in 2000 as well, allow for such comparisons. Despite efforts to create new comparable scales across adult and student samples, we were largely unsuccessful in doing so. Not surprisingly, results suggested that student perceptions of the consent decree and efforts the school district has undertaken to address racial inequities did not cohere in valid and reliable subscales in the way staff and parent perceptions did.

Overall, with a few notable exceptions, school staff perceived the climate of Champaign schools in positive terms. Parent, middle and high school student perceptions were generally slightly less positive than those of staff. Still, their perceptions were typically neutral to positive. Elementary students tended to see the climate more positively than older school students.

Because there were more Whites than African Americans in each sample, the average results for each sample (when race was ignored) tended to look like those of the Whites.

⁹ An individual may interpret the meaning of any single question on a survey differently than was intended by the survey creator. Moreover, an individual's response to any given question can be affected by many factors. Therefore, when measuring broader concepts, averaging responses to several specific questions can create a more accurate picture of how people feel about the concept. Use of multiple questions to measure each climate dimension increases the validity and reliability of survey results.

However, there were statistically significant differences across race on most perceptions. This was true for staff, parents, middle and high school students, and elementary school students (though a bit less so for elementary students). When results were examined separately for Whites and African Americans, significant differences emerged. African Americans saw many aspects of the social climate in starkly more negative terms than did Whites.

Table 1: Climate Dimension Definitions

Subscale Name	Description	Samples
Influence	Perceived impact on school operations and decision-making.	Staff, Parents *
Trust and Respect	Perceptions of staffs’ trust of each other; staffs’ respect for each other; and, the respect the school district has for them.	Staff, Parents, High School, Middle School
Belonging	Feelings of belonging at school.	Staff, Parents **
Encouragement of Parent Involvement	Perceptions concerning how encouraging the school is of parent involvement.	Staff, Parents *
Teacher Expectations	Perceptions of teachers’ expectations for students.	Staff, Parents, High School, Middle School
Fairness General	Perceptions that all students are treated fairly.	Staff, Parents *
Racial Fairness	Perceptions that students of all races are treated fairly.	Staff, Parents, High School, Middle School
Fairness Discipline	Perceptions that all students are disciplined fairly.	Staff, Parents **
Experiences of Racism	How often a respondent has experienced racism.	Staff, Parents, High School, Middle School
Need to Address Racial Issues	Perceptions of the need to change the school system to better address racial disparities.	Staff, Parents, High School, Middle School
Cultural Understanding	Perceptions of other staffs’ level of cultural understanding.	Staff, Parents **
Family Attributions for Misbehavior	Perceptions that student misbehavior at school results from families not valuing education.	Staff, Parents, High School, Middle School
Consent Decree: Negative Consequences	Perceptions of consequences resulting from Consent Decree.	Staff, Parents **
Consent Decree: Making Too Much About Race	Perceptions of Consent Decree placing too much attention on race within the district.	Staff, Parents **
School Resource Officers	Perceptions that the presence of School Resource Officers makes the school safer.	Staff, Parents, High School, Middle School
Consent Decree: School Policies and Practices	Perceptions of the fairness of school policies and practices in special education and discipline.	Staff, Parents *
Qualities of Desegregated Schools	Perceptions of the importance of different aspects of racially desegregated Champaign schools.	Staff, Parents *
Discomfort Talking About Race	Staffs’ level of discomfort when talking about race.	Staff, Parents **
Need to Talk About Race	Perceptions of the need to talk about race	Staff, Parents *
School Parent Contact - Discipline	Perceptions of contact school initiates with parents about child disciplinary problems	Parents * ***
Evaluations of Professional Development	Perceptions of preparedness to work in a diverse environment through professional development initiatives.	Staff * ***
Need for More Professional Development	Perceptions of the need for continued diversity training.	Staff, Parents *
Teacher Preparedness for Diversity	Students’ perceptions of teachers’ preparedness to work in a diverse environment	High School, Middle School ***
Future Possibilities	Students’ perceptions of the likelihood of success beyond school environment.	High School, Middle School ***

* subscale was not measured for student groups; ** reliability for this subscale was too low (Cronbach’s alpha less than or equal to .60) to report results for student groups; *** subscale was not measured for staff or parent groups

Staff and Parent Results¹⁰

Influence, Trust and Respect, Belonging. On average, Champaign school staff and parents perceived the social climate of the schools in relatively positive terms. Most felt valued and appreciated as members of the school community. Approximately 58% of all staff and 50% of parents believed that their opinions matter and their ideas and suggestions influence the operations and decision-making at their school (Influence). Among staff, perhaps not surprisingly, administrative staff and non-teaching certified staff felt the highest levels of influence, followed by teachers, then non-certified staff. Over two thirds of all staff and 71% of all parents felt that they are respected by, and can trust, other school staff (Trust and Respect). Staff and parents overwhelmingly reported a sense of belonging to the school (81% & 77% respectively) (Belonging). Half of all staff strongly agreed they belonged while a third of all parents did so. Still, over a third of all staff (35%) and nearly half of all parents (45%) were neutral or not sure about their influence, and roughly a quarter of both staff (28%) and parents (23%) were neutral or not sure about whether they have the trust and respect of school staff.¹¹ (See pages A12, A14 and A16 of Appendix A for more details regarding staff, and pages E13, E15 and E17 for more details regarding parents.)

Encouragement of Parent Involvement. Similarly, staff and parents had very positive views about the extent to which their schools encourage parents to get involved in their children’s education and in the school. Eighty-five percent of staff and 66% of parents either agreed or strongly agreed that schools encourage parent involvement. (See page A17 of Appendix A and page E18 of Appendix E for more details.)

School Parent Contact – Discipline. This scale measured parents’ perceptions that they are contacted in a timely fashion by the school, that their input is sought, and sought before action is taken, when their child has a serious disciplinary problem. A nearly two thirds majority of all parents (62%) agreed, while roughly a third were neutral/not sure (34% of all parents).

Teacher Expectations. A large majority of all staff and parents perceived that teachers have high expectations for their students. Three quarters of staff and 86% of parents perceived that teachers expect good behavior from African American students and expect their students to go to college. Still, nearly one in five staff (18%) were not sure, while seven percent actively disagreed. (See page A19 of Appendix A and page E20 of Appendix E for more details.)

Fairness. Most staff and parents also felt that students of all kinds are treated fairly in the schools, regardless of race, social class, or how well they achieve in school. Depending on the specific aspect of fairness, only ten to fourteen percent of all staff and only sixteen to twenty percent of all parents disagreed that all students are treated fairly at their school. The largest

¹⁰ Of the 383 staff respondents, 60% are teachers, 6% administrators, 12% are other certified staff, and 19% were other non-certified staff. Results were examined separately for teachers and non-teachers. See Appendices A and B for a further details on the demographic characteristics of the staff and parent samples.

¹¹ For the purposes of the analyses in this report, “neutral” and “not sure” responses were both treated as midway between agree and disagree. Separate analyses were conducted which treated “not sure” as missing data (effectively excluding them from the analyses). No differences in results emerged when “not sure” was treated this way, supporting the decision to combined “neutral” and “not sure” in computation of scale means.

proportion of staff (73%) and the majority of parents (50%) perceived that all students are treated fairly regardless of social class or how well they achieve in school (Fairness General). While still generally positive, there were slightly lower rates of agreement with the ideas that students are treated fairly regardless of race (Racial Fairness - 67% of staff and 50% of parents) and that all students are disciplined fairly (Fairness Discipline - 55% of staff and 50% of parents). On the other hand, on all three fairness scales (Fairness General, Racial Fairness and Fairness Discipline), between one fifth and one third of staff were neutral and another ten to 14% percent disagreed students were treated fairly. Parents were a bit more negative than staff: roughly one third of parents were neutral and nearly one fifth disagreed students were treated fairly. Still, the large majority of staff and the majority of parents saw these areas of student treatment as fair. (See pages A20, A22, and A24 of Appendix A and pages E21, E23, and E25 of Appendix E for more details.)

Experiences of Racism. Reports of overt acts of racism were rare among both staff and parents. A large majority of staff (77%) and parents (92%) reported never having experienced racism or being treated badly because of their race at school. Only six percent of staff and two percent of parents reported such experiences more often than a few times. (See page A26 of Appendix A and page E27 of Appendix E for more details.)

Need to Address Racial Issues. Staff and parent perceptions of the need to address racial issues – perceptions that the school district should work to reduce racial disparities in academic programs and discipline as well as take race into account in teaching and hiring – varied more than those on the scales discussed above, and were considerably more negative. Only 18% of all staff and 16% of parents actively agreed that this need exists in the district. Roughly equal proportions of the remaining staff were either neutral/not sure (42%) or did not (40%) perceive such a need, fewer parents were neutral/not sure (36%) than did not (48%) perceive such a need. (See page A28 of Appendix A and page E29 of Appendix E for more details.)

Cultural Understanding. Most staff (56%) and parents (52%) also believed, on average, that teachers take students' learning styles and cultural backgrounds into account when teaching. Only ten percent of staff and nine percent of parents actively disagreed, while the remaining 34% of staff and 39% of parents were either neutral or not sure. (See page A30 of Appendix A and page E31 of Appendix E for more details.)

Family Attributions for Misbehavior. This scale measured respondents' perceptions that student misbehavior at school results from families not valuing education. Roughly equal proportions of staff either endorsed (35%) or disagreed (36%) with the view that student problems stem from a failure of parents to adequately value education. Slightly fewer than a third of staff (29%) were neutral or not sure. (See page A32 of Appendix A for more details.) Parents were more likely to endorse this view (48%) than staff and less likely to disagree (20%). (See page E33 of Appendix E for more details.)

Consent Decree: Negative Consequences. This scale measured perceptions that efforts to ensure racial fairness (e.g., changes in district policies and practices) under the Consent Decree has resulted in negative unintended consequences. The majority of both staff and parents did not express strong views on this; roughly half (50% of staff and 53% of parents) responded neutral/not sure. 3 Of the remainder, more staff than parents disagreed that the consent decree had negative consequences. Among staff, those who disagreed/strongly disagreed (31%)

outnumbered those who agreed/strongly agreed (19%), while among parents those who agreed/strongly agreed (29%) outnumbered those who disagreed/strongly disagreed (18%). (See page A34 of Appendix A and page E35 of Appendix E for more details.)

Consent Decree: Making Too Much about Race. This scale measured perceptions that the school district, through the Consent Decree, has placed too much attention on race. Nearly half of all staff (48%) and parents (46%) reported being neutral/not sure about whether too much attention has been paid to race in the district, while slightly less than a third of both groups (30% of staff, 29% of parents) believed this to be true and between one fifth one quarter (22% of staff, 25% of parents) disagreed. (See page A35 of Appendix A and page E36 of Appendix E for more details.)

Analyses of individual items related to this scale revealed a complex pattern of perceptions. First, both staff and parents on average felt well informed about the consent decree. Nearly three quarters of all staff (73%) felt well informed and only 14%, mostly newcomers to the district, reported not being well informed. While the majority (59%) of all parents felt well informed about the consent decree, about twice as many parents (30%) as staff felt uninformed. Second, there was a wide range in perceptions of whether it was appropriate for the legal system to be involved in ensuring racial fairness in the Champaign schools, with slightly higher percentages of both groups disagreeing than agreeing that it appropriate. Roughly a third of staff (30%) and parents (34%) agreed or strongly agreed it was appropriate. Another 30% of staff and 28% of parents were neutral/not sure. The largest percentage of both groups (40% of staff and 37% of parents) disagreed (17% and 16% respectively) or strongly disagreed (23% and 21% respectively). Still, slightly higher rates of staff (41%) believed that Consent Decree efforts to address racial discrimination in the district have improved academic excellence in Unit 4 schools, while 35% were neutral or not sure and almost a quarter disagreed. The largest group of parents (40%), on the other hand, were neutral/not sure about the effect of the Consent Decree on academic excellence – while, opposite the finding for staff, more parents disagreed (34%) than agreed (26%) that it improved academic excellence. Among staff, there was overwhelming agreement that the problems of racial discrimination in Unit 4 schools do not need continued court involvement (80%). A majority of parents (60%) felt the same. Fifty-seven percent of staff and 40% of parents strongly disagreed with the need for continued involvement. Only seven percent of staff and 17% of parents believed there is such a need. While this is true, a third of the staff disagreed or strongly disagreed that Unit 4 schools should stop paying so much attention to race (38% agree or strongly agreed).

School Resource Officers (SRO). This scale measured perceptions that the presence of the School Resource Officers in the middle and high schools has reduced discipline issues and increased safety. Overall there was substantial support for the idea that SROs increase safety. A large majority of staff either agree/strongly agree (44%) or are neutral/not sure (42%). Only 14% of staff disagreed. Among staff working in the middle schools or high schools support is even stronger, with 58% agreeing/strongly agreeing and only 27% neutral/not sure. Parent perceptions were similar to those of staff – 52% agreed/strongly agreed that SROs increase school safety while only 8% disagreed/strongly disagreed (See page A36 of Appendix A and page E37 of Appendix E for more details.)

Consent Decree: School Policies and Practices. This scale measured perceptions that school procedures associated with discipline and special education are fair for students of all

racess. The vast majority of staff either agreed (57%) or were neutral/not sure (35%) that school procedures are fair. Only 8% disagreed. (See page A37 of Appendix A for more details.) Far fewer parents (29%) than staff agreed such policies and practices were fair for students of all races. Instead, the majority of parents (61%) were neutral/not sure on this scale. Ten percent disagreed/strongly disagreed. (See page E38 of Appendix E for more details.)

Qualities of Desegregated Champaign Schools. Given Unit 4’s goal of racially desegregated schools, the survey examined staff and parent perceptions of the importance of various issues found in previous research to foster positive school climate for African American students in desegregated schools. These issues included African American representation in academic programs and among school staff, and the teaching of cultural sensitivity and African American history. (See page A38 of Appendix A and page E39 of Appendix E for more details.)

Overall, the results in this domain reflected moderate support for these issues, with staff expressing slightly more support on average than parents. When the issues are viewed as a group, 88% of staff and 83% of parents believed they are at least somewhat important. However, when each item on the dimension was viewed individually, significant variability in the amount of support for each separate issue was apparent, as were differences in perception between staff and parents. Both staff and parents viewed the teaching of cultural sensitivity as the most important issue (71% of staff and 66% of parents rated this as important or very important and only six percent and ten percent respectively rated this as not important). For staff the teaching of African American History and inclusion of African American perspectives throughout the curricula were also rated as more important than other issues, with nearly two thirds of all staff viewing these as important or very important. These two items were rated as least important by parents, with fewer than half of all parents rating them important or very important. Instead, over half of all parents viewed proportional representation of African Americans among the teaching staff and among students in upper level courses as important. Staff rated proportional African American representation in special education classes as the least important item. While only forty-six percent rated it as important or very important, nearly a third of all staff (31%) rated it as not important. Support from staff for proportional representation of African Americans in upper level classes and among teaching and administrative staff fell between these extremes. Fifty-nine percent of staff viewed proportional representation of African Americans in upper level classes as important or very important. Fifty-seven percent of staff viewed proportional representation of African Americans among teachers as important or very important. Finally, 52% of staff viewed proportional representation of African Americans among administrators as important or very important. Still, on average across items only one quarter of staff and fewer parents viewed these issues as very important.

Discomfort Talking about Race. In general, most staff (59%) reported feeling comfortable talking about race and racial issues in their school. Yet, close to a third of all staff (29%) were neutral or not sure about their comfort levels, and an additional 12% reported feeling uncomfortable. (See page A40 of Appendix A for more details.) Parent comfort levels were lower: only 42% reported feeling comfortable, roughly the same proportion were neutral/not sure (38%) and 20% reported feeling uncomfortable to talk about race and racial issues in their school. (See page E41 of Appendix E for more details.)

Need to Talk about Race. This scale measured perceptions that to address problems in the schools more talk about race is needed and that administrators play an important role in

facilitating such talk. There was considerable disagreement about this issue among both staff and parents. While over a third of both staff (36%) and parents (37%) were neutral or not sure about this the largest group agreed or strongly agreed (41% of staff and 43% of parents). Nearly one quarter of all staff (23%) and one fifth of all parents (20%) disagreed that more talk about race was needed. (See page A41 of Appendix A and page E42 of Appendix E for more details.)

Evaluations of Professional Development. While over one third (36%) of all staff did not have a strong view of the benefits of the district’s professional development efforts aimed to help teachers work with students of various backgrounds, 44% agreed that they had benefited from them. Only one in five staff reported that they did not benefit. Interestingly, while 88% of staff report that they feel well prepared to teach students of all races, only 44% of all staff feel well prepared by the district to talk with students about race. (See page A42 of Appendix A for more details.) These questions were asked only of staff.

Need for more Professional Development. The majority of staff (57%) perceived a need for more professional development to help teachers teach students of diverse backgrounds well. Over a quarter (28%) were neutral/not sure about this, while 15% did not perceive such a need. (See page A43 of Appendix A for more details.) Parents perceived slightly less need for professional development in this area. Forty six percent of all parents endorsed this need. Thirty six percent of parents were neutral/not sure while 16% disagreed this need existed.

Student Results

On balance, middle and high school students’ perceptions of the school climate were more neutral to negative than were those of staff. On five of seven scales that allow for comparison, students on average saw the climate in more negative terms than staff. Students perceived less Trust and Respect, less racial fairness, more need to address racial issues, less improved safety due to presence of the SROs and reported more frequent experiences of racism. Descriptions of how middle- and high-school student perceptions differed from those of staff follow immediately. Results for elementary students are then presented.

Middle and High School Students

Trust and Respect. Students were less likely than staff to perceive interpersonal trust and respect (primarily from school personnel) in the school. While 67% of staff perceive interpersonal trust and respect in the school, only 57% of middle school students and 53% of high school students do. (See pages B9-B10 of Appendix B and pages C9-C10 Appendix C for more details.)

Teacher Expectations. Like staff, but even more so, both middle and high school students overwhelmingly perceive that teachers have high expectations of them. Eighty-six percent of middle school and 82% of high school students agree or strongly agree that teachers expect them to get good grades, behave well, graduate high school and go on to college. (See page B11 of Appendix B and page C11 of Appendix C for more details.)

Racial Fairness. Middle and high school students tended to be significantly less positive

about the racial fairness of the schools than was staff. On average, students reported being neutral or not sure about how fair the schools are. Larger proportions of students, especially high school students (17% of middle and 24% of high school students) than staff (11%) felt that the schools are unfair. (See pages B12-B13 of Appendix B and pages C12-C13 of Appendix C for more details.)

Experiences of Racism. Like the adult samples, the large group of middle (48%) and high school students (44%) reported never having experienced racism or being treated badly because of their race at school. However, this was significantly less than the rate among staff (77%). Moreover, over three times as many students (20% of both middle and high school students) as staff (6%) reported having experienced racism monthly or more frequently. (See pages B14-B15 of Appendix B and pages C14-C15 of Appendix C for more details.)

Need to Address Racial Issues. Roughly equal proportions of students (21% high school, 24% middle school) and staff (18%) agreed or strongly agreed in the need to address racial issues. Larger proportions of students (61% middle school, and 51% high school) than staff (42%), however, were neutral or not sure about this need. (See pages B16-B17 of Appendix B and pages C16-C17 of Appendix C for more details.)

Family Attributions for Misbehavior. While roughly equal proportions of high school students (36%) and staff (35%) agreed that student misbehavior results from families not valuing education, fewer (25%) middle school students did. Students (37% of middle school and 38% of high) tended to be more neutral/not sure about this than staff (29%). Middle school students (38%) were the most likely to disagree. (See pages B18-B19 of Appendix B and pages C18-C19 of Appendix C for more details.)

School Resource Officers (SRO). Both middle school students (36%) and high school students (37%) disagreed/strongly disagreed more often than staff (14%) that SROs increase school safety. At the same time, as was true for staff, a majority of students either agree/strongly agree (23% middle school, 26% high school) or are neutral/not sure (41% middle school, 37% high school). (See page B20 of Appendix B and page C of Appendix C20 for more details.)

Teacher Preparedness for Diversity. This scale measured student perceptions that their teachers are well prepared to work in a school environment with a diverse group of students. The bulk of both middle school (48%) and high school (52%) student perceptions were neutral/not sure about this. Slightly more middle school students (38%) than high school students (32%) perceived their teachers to be prepared. (See page B21 of Appendix B and page C21 of Appendix C for more details.)

Future Possibilities: Both middle and high school students had very positive perceptions of the likelihood of their success beyond school. A total of ninety-two percent of middle school and 90% of high school students either agree or strongly agreed with this. Seventy percent of middle and 60% of high school students strongly agreed. (See page B22 of Appendix B and page C22 of Appendix C for more details.)

4th and 5th Grade Elementary Students

Unlike responses to the middle- and high-school versions of the survey, which captured

nine distinct dimensions of the social climate, responses to questions on the elementary version revealed only five dimensions of the social climate. This fact likely reflects, in part, a different, perhaps less highly developed cognitive representation of the perceived climate among elementary students compared to middle- and high-school students.

Trust and Caring. This scale measured students' perceptions that they can trust their teachers and that their teachers care for them. Results indicated that 75% of students had a positive view of trust and caring in the relationship with their teacher. Only four percent of all students had a negative view on this dimension. There were no differences on this dimension across race or grade of respondent. (See page D7 of Appendix D for the items which measured this dimension and more details.)

Support and Belonging. This scale measured students' feelings of being supported and belonging at school. Students reported very positive perceptions on this dimension. Nearly two thirds (62%) of all 4th and 5th grade students agreed or strongly agreed with such feelings while only ten percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. (See page D8 of Appendix D for the items which measured this dimension and more details.)

Teacher Expectations. As was true for middle and high school students, the vast majority (84%) of 4th and 5th graders perceived that their teachers had positive expectation of their behavior and academic ability. While 13% were neutral/not sure, only 3% of 4th and 5th graders disagreed or strongly disagreed. (See page D9 of Appendix D for the items which measured this dimension and more details.)

Fairness. The elementary school measure of fairness combines items from the 3 fairness domains (general, racial and discipline) captured by the middle school and high school scales. A significant majority (62%) of 4th and 5th graders agreed or strongly agreed that they and their classmates are treated fairly at their school. Nearly one third (29%) were neutral/not sure, while eight percent disagreed. (See page D10 of Appendix D for the items which measured this dimension and more details.)

Negative Racial Experiences. Three quarters of all 4th and 5th graders disagreed (21%) or strongly disagreed (54%) that they have sometimes felt badly, or another student has treated them badly because of the color of their skin. Nine percent agreed (four percent) or strongly agreed (five percent). (See page D11 of Appendix D for the items which measured this dimension and more details.)

Differences in Perceptions of Climate by School.

Possible differences in student and staff perceptions across schools were examined within school level. Possible differences in parent perceptions across schools could not be examined as parents often completed their surveys with students from multiple schools in mind.

4th and 5th Grade Students: At the elementary school level, small but significant differences emerged on 3 of 5 dimensions of climate: trust and caring, fairness, and negative racial experiences. On average, students at Dr. Howard and B.T. Washington perceived their schools to have higher levels of trust and caring than did students at Barkstall, Stratton and

Kenwood. Also, on average, students at B.T. Washington, Westview, Carrie Busey and Bottenfield perceived their schools to be fairer than students at Barkstall, Stratton, and Garden Hills. Finally, on average, students at Garden Hills were more likely to agree that they had had negative racial experiences than students at Robeson. Given that the racial composition of the elementary school samples varied considerably, school differences were examined separately within race. Controlling for race accounted for the majority of differences between schools. White students at Westview perceived their school to treat students more fairly than did white students at Barkstall. African American students at Carrie Busey perceived their school as fairer than African American students at Stratton. And white students at Garden Hills reported more negative racial experiences than African American students at Robeson.

Middle School Students: At the middle school level, small but significant differences emerged on 3 of 9 dimensions of the climate. Overall, Franklin students perceived slightly more need to address racial issues and slightly more experiences of racism than students at Jefferson. Franklin students also had less positive views of the impact of school resource officers on school safety than students at both Edison and Jefferson. Because the proportion of African American students in the Franklin sample (46%) was higher than for either Edison (32%) or Jefferson (36%), analyses were conducted to see if this might account for the differences in perceptions across schools. When race was controlled, there were differences on 2 of 9 climate dimensions for African Americans – racial fairness and school resource officers. Among African American students, those at Jefferson perceived more racial fairness and had more positive views of the impact of school resource officers on school safety than students at both Edison and Franklin. Among White students, those at Franklin reported slightly more experiences of racism than those at Jefferson.

High School Students: At the high school level, small but significant differences emerged on 4 of 9 climate dimensions. Overall, Central High School students perceived less racial fairness, more need to address racial issues, more teachers prepared for diversity, and less positive views of the impact of school resource officers on school safety than Centennial High School students. Because the proportion of African American students at Central is higher than at Centennial (32 v. 26%), analyses were conducted to see if this might account for the differences in perceptions across schools. When race was controlled, there were no differences on 7 of 9 climate dimensions, and no differences across schools on any dimension for African American students. White students at Central, however, perceived slightly more need to address racial issues and had slightly less positive views of the impact of school resource officers on school safety than did White students at Centennial High School.

Middle School Staff: At the middle school level, significant and generally large differences emerged on 4 of 21 dimensions of climate – family attributions for misbehavior, trust and respect, influence and school resource officers. Franklin staff were more likely than those at Jefferson to attribute student misbehavior to family values, and were less likely than staff at Edison to perceive that the school resource officers increase safety at their school. Staff at Edison perceived less trust and respect from their colleagues and less influence on school matters than staff at either Franklin or Jefferson. Controlling for differences in the racial composition of the staff did not affect these findings.

High School Staff: At the high school level, significant and moderate differences emerged on just 2 of 21 dimensions of climate – fairness discipline and school resource officers.

Central staff were more likely than those at Centennial to perceive that discipline at their school was administered fairly and to perceive that the school resource officers increase safety at their school. When differences in the racial composition of the staff across schools were taken into account, there were no differences in perceptions between Central and Centennial staff.

Sample sizes for staff at individual elementary schools were too small to permit testing of between school differences at the elementary school level.

Differences in Perceptions of Climate by Race.

As was true in 2000, in 2009, African Americans saw the social climate in markedly more negative terms than Whites. Differences in perceptions between African Americans and Whites are more the rule than the exception in Champaign Schools. For all but the elementary student sample where race differences were small, and on a high proportion of all climate dimensions, there were substantial differences across race.¹² The most pervasive racial differences occurred among school staff. On 17 of the 21 (81%) climate dimensions measured, African American staff perceived the climate more negatively than their White peers. Parents had the next largest proportion of climate dimensions with differences across race. On 15 of the 21 (71%) climate dimensions measured, African American parents perceived the climate more negatively than their White peers. Fewer, yet numerous, racial differences were found for high school and middle school students (for each group, on six of nine, or 67% of dimensions).

On four of the seven dimensions that permitted comparison across the adult, middle school and high school student samples, White parents had the most favorable view of the climate, followed by White school staff and white students. For the remaining three dimensions, White staff had the most favorable view followed by White parents. On balance, African American high school students had the most negative views followed closely by African American school staff.

Across samples, the most consistent differences in perceptions appeared on three climate dimensions: Racial Fairness, Need to Address Racial Issues, and Family Attributions for Misbehavior. Large racial differences were found on each of these dimensions in all four samples in which they were measured (staff, parents and middle and high school students). African American respondents were, depending on sample, between two and four times more likely than their White counterparts to believe the schools are racially unfair and between two and five times more likely to perceive a need to address racial issues. Similarly, across all four samples, Whites were about twice as likely as African Americans to attribute student misbehavior to family causes. There were also large racial differences for both adult samples – staff and parents – on two dimensions of the climate: Consent Decree – Making too much of Race, and Qualities of Desegregated Schools. African American staff were over four times more likely than their White counterparts and African American parents were about three times more

¹² Parallel differences exist across socio-economic class, with students from lower income families consistently tending to perceive the climate more negatively than those from middle and upper income families. However, as was true with the results of the 2000 survey, statistical analyses indicate that racial differences in perceptions cannot be accounted for by social class (nor by students' academic or disciplinary status). Racial differences persist even when analyses controlled for income level and students' academic and disciplinary status.

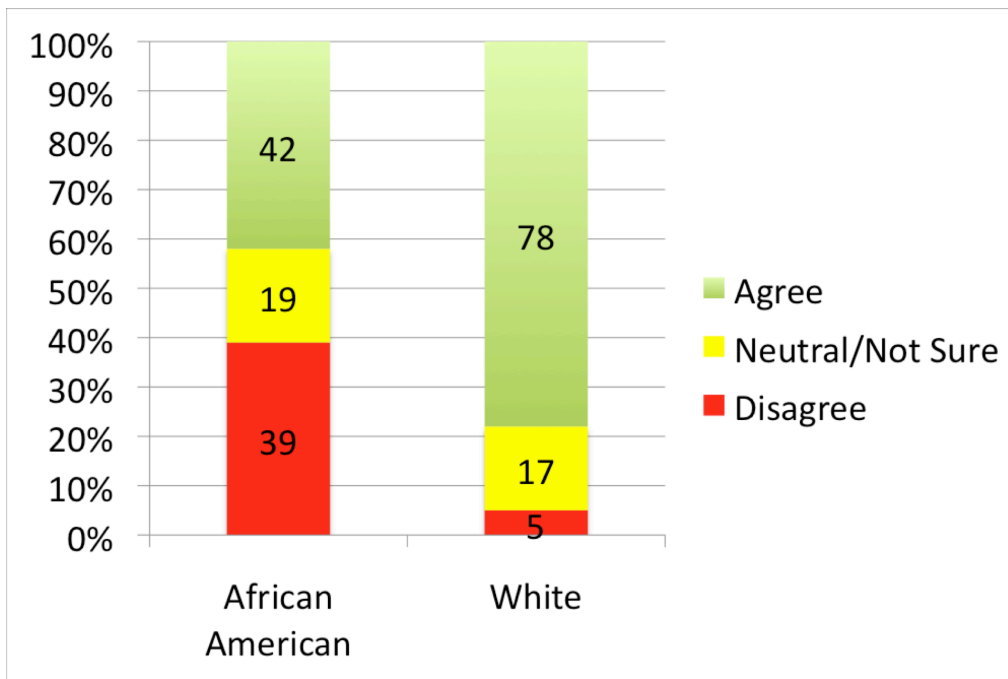
likely than their White peers to disagree that the Consent Decree had made too much of race. Similarly, African American parents were over four times more likely than White parents and African American staff over two times more likely to view African American representation in academic programs and among school staff, and the teaching of cultural sensitivity and African American history as very important. Moderate to large racial differences among staff and/or parents also exist in perceptions of Trust and Respect, Belonging, Perceptions of Encouragement of Parent Involvement, Teacher Expectations, Fairness Discipline, Fairness General, Cultural Understanding, Consent Decree – Negative Consequences, School Resource Officers, Need to Talk More about Race, and Need for More Professional Development around Race.¹³

4th and 5th grade elementary students race differences. Because the dimensions of climate that were measured among elementary school students were different than those for the older students and adults, race differences for elementary students are reported separately. Compared to their White peers, African American 4th and 5th grade students were slightly more likely to agree they had been treated or felt badly because of the color of their skin. African Americans were also slightly less likely to agree: (1) teachers had high expectations of them, (2) they felt supported and belonged at school, and (3) their school is fair. African Americans were also slightly less likely to agree: (1) teachers had high expectations of them, (2) they felt supported and belonged at school, and (3) their school is fair.

¹³ For the purpose of describing race differences, strongly agree and agree were combined and labeled “agree,” and strongly disagree and disagree were combined and labeled “disagree.”

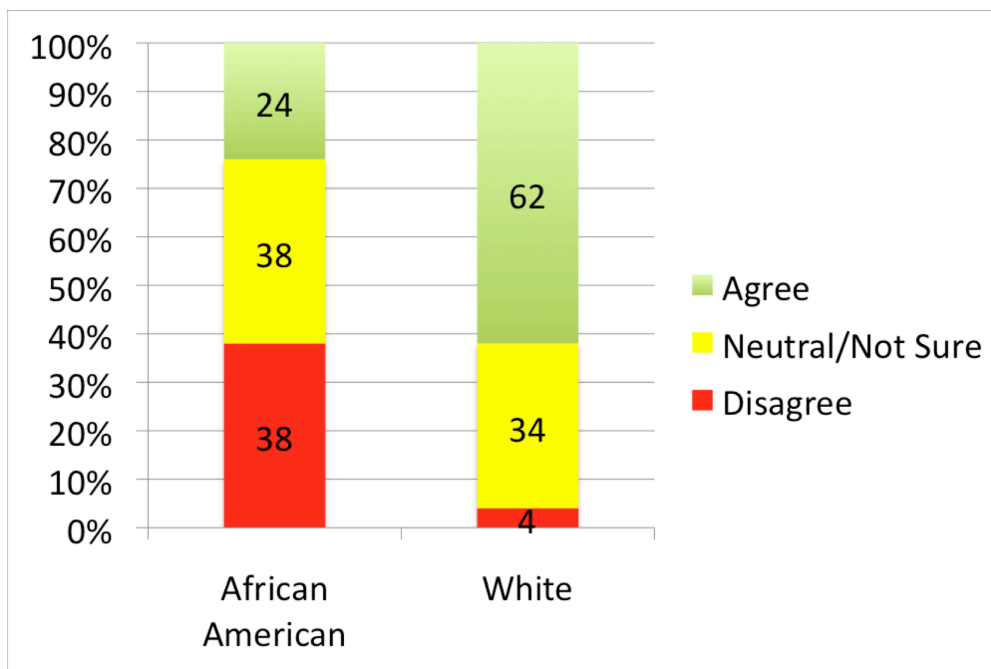
Fairness. African Americans were far more likely than Whites to perceive that the schools are unfair to children. Thirty nine percent of African American staff compared to only five percent of Whites disagreed that students are treated fairly in the schools, regardless of race or how well they achieve in school. Similar findings were obtained for staff perceptions of both the fairness of discipline, and racial fairness. Twenty-seven percent of African Americans compared to ten percent of Whites disagreed that discipline is administered fairly in the schools. Twenty-four percent of African Americans compared to nine percent of Whites disagreed that the schools treat all students fairly across race. Additionally, on each fairness dimension, larger proportions of African Americans compared to Whites were neutral or not sure about fairness. Thus, on average, roughly two thirds of African American staff failed to report that they believe the schools are fair to students while only 29% of Whites felt this way. Similar, but somewhat less pronounced differences exist for the parent, middle and high school student samples.

Staff Perceptions of *Fairness – General* by Race:



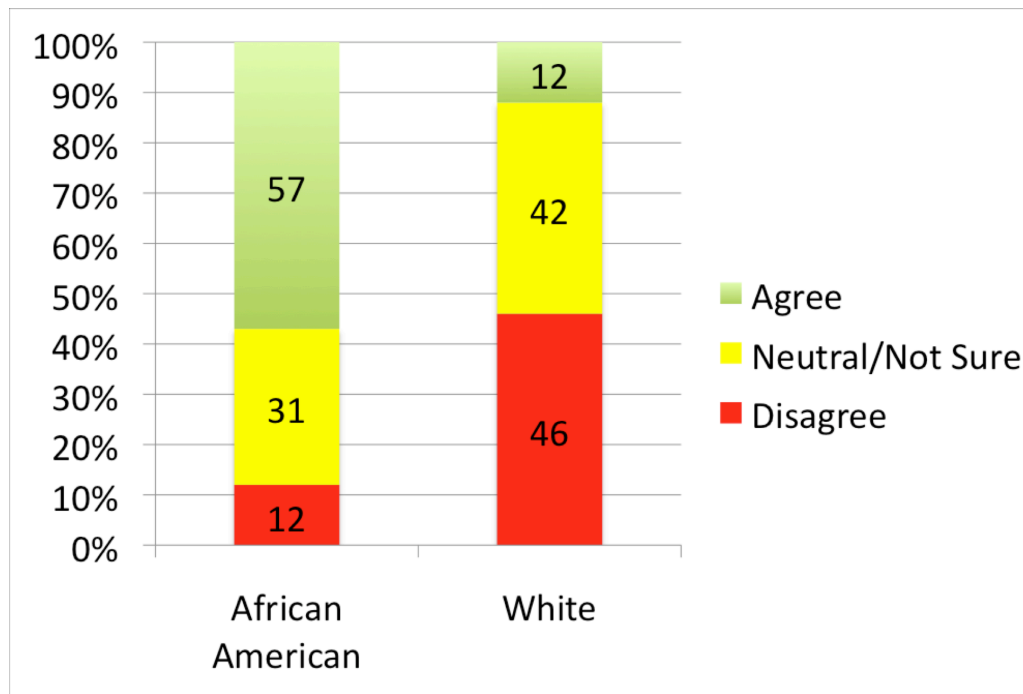
Cultural Understanding. While White staff tended to believe that teachers at their school take students’ learning styles and cultural backgrounds into account when teaching. African American staff, generally, did not (only 24% of African American staff actively agree while 62% of White staff did). Racial differences in parents’ views of the cultural understanding of teachers, while parallel to those of staff, are not quite as extreme. Fifty five percent of White parents, compared to only 29% of African American parents agree that the teachers take students’ cultural backgrounds into account when teaching. (See page E31 of Appendix E for more the items that measured this dimension and more details.)

Staff Perceptions of *Teachers’ Cultural Understanding* by Race:

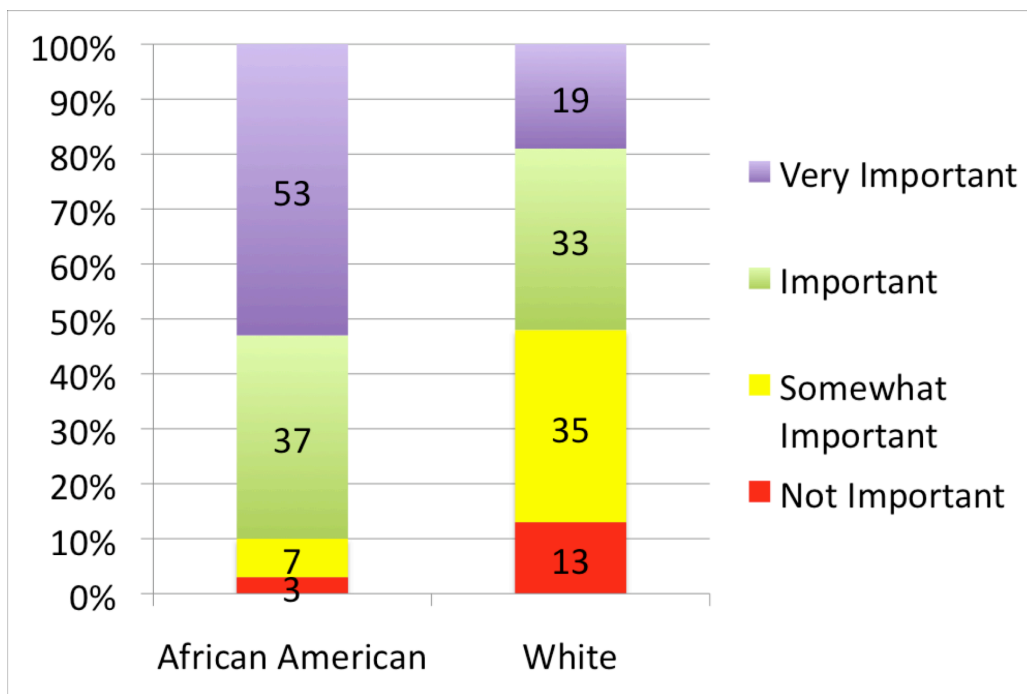


Need to Address Racial Issues. Consistent with their perceptions of Fairness and Cultural Understanding, 57% of African American staff and 47% of African American parents believed their schools needed to better address racial disparities. Only 12% of White staff and 11% of White parents felt the same. Parallel differences, although not quite as large, exist for both middle and high school students.

Staff Perceptions of *Need to Address Racial Issues* by Race:



Qualities of Desegregated Champaign Schools. African American staff (53%) felt it is very important that Champaign schools both adopt curricula that embrace African American perspectives and achieve proportional representation of African Americans in various school roles (e.g., teacher, administrator) and programs (e.g., upper level or special education courses). Far fewer White staff (only 19%) perceived these qualities of desegregated schools as very important. Ninety percent of African American staff viewed these qualities as important or very important.



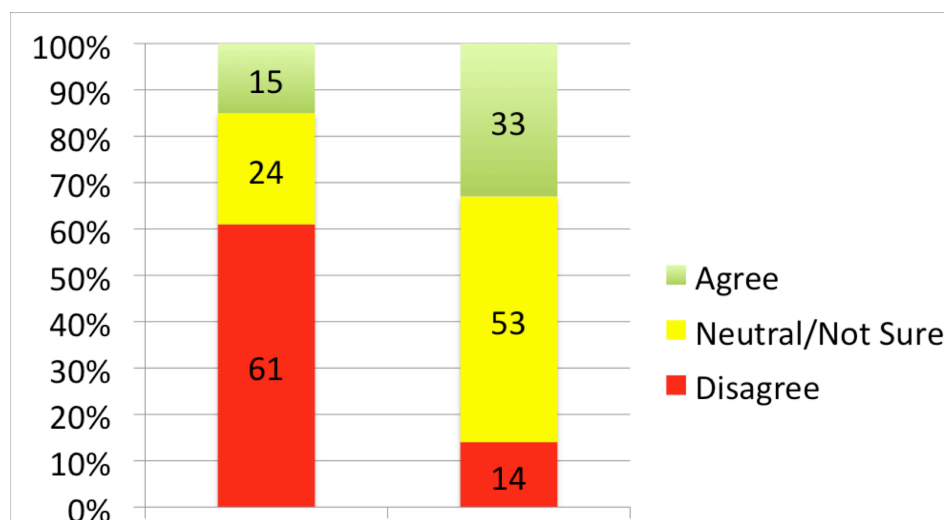
important, compared to 52% of White staff. Parent perceptions showed even more pronounced differences across race. Seventy one percent of African American parents viewed these qualities of desegregated schools as very important, compared to only 15% of White parents. Fully 98% of African American parents rated these qualities as important or very important, while less than half (48%) of White parents did so.

Experiences of Racism. While differences between African Americans and Whites in their perceptions of whether they have experienced racism were not particularly large (between 3% and 7% across samples), it should be noted that when disaggregated from Whites, high proportions of both middle (21%) and high school (16%) African American students reported experiencing racism at their school monthly or more often. Fewer adult respondents, both staff and parents, reported having such experiences.

Consent Decree: Making too much of Race. African American staff (61%) were more than four times as likely as Whites (14%) to disagree with the idea that the district has made too much of race through the Consent Decree. White staff (33%) were more than twice as likely as African Americans (15%) to agree. Racial differences in parent perceptions were a bit less disparate due to a higher proportion of White parents (21%) than staff disagreeing that the

district has made too much of race. Still, 44% of White parents agree that Unit 4 efforts to address racial inequities discriminate unfairly against Whites, 46% agree that Unit 4 schools should stop paying so much attention to race, and 64% disagree that Whites in the school district have certain advantages because due to their race.

Staff Perceptions of *Consent Decree – Making too much of Race* by Race:



Consent Decree: Negative Consequences. While there were no significant racial differences in staff perceptions on this dimension, over one third of all White parents (35%) compared to only two percent of African American parents agreed that the Consent Decree had significant negative consequences. White parents (40%) were almost four times as likely as African Americans (11%) to agree that because of district efforts to ensure racial fairness, standards in gifted / AP / honors classes are lower. Over half of all White parents (55%) compared to 13% of African American parents agreed that District efforts to ensure racial fairness interfered with teachers’ effective use of discipline.

School Resource Officers. White staff (46%) and parents (54%) tended to agree that the presence of school resource officers in the schools makes them feel safer and reduces disciplinary problems. African American staff and parents were more neutral, as were all students. Only 27% of African American staff agreed, and only 13% of African American high school students agreed.

Changes in Perceptions of Climate from 2000 to 2009.

Over half of dimensions measured by the 2009 Staff (11 of 21) and Parent (12 of 21) Surveys were also measured in 2000. On the 2009 Middle and High School Survey, five of nine dimensions were also measured in 2000. The repeated measures allow for direct comparison of the climate of Champaign Schools on these dimensions for the years 2000 and 2009. Attempts

to interpret the results of such comparisons must take into consideration two very important issues. First, different people were surveyed in 2000 and 2009; many staff members are new to the district since 2000 and virtually none of the 2009 students would have been old enough to participate in the 2000. Thus, statements of “change” cannot refer to change in particular individuals, but rather change in the climate of the schools per se. Second, changes in the broader community, society and culture during the past ten years are likely to have affected perceptions of school climate and the meaning of race to school climate. These and other issues are taken up in more detail below in the discussion. With these caveats in mind, it is interesting and worthwhile to compare the perceived climate over time.

Perhaps the most striking finding with respect to change from 2000 to 2009 is how consistent perceptions have remained over time. The overall pattern of findings from 2009 is remarkably consistent with the overall pattern of findings from the 2000 survey. The core features of the school climate – influence, trust and respect, fairness, need to address racial issues, cultural understanding, and experiences of racism – have remained quite stable over the past nine years. This is not to say there has been no change. But changes have been small in magnitude relative to, and have generally not affected, the overall pattern of generally positive perceptions of White staff, parents and students and considerably more negative (though on many measures still positive) perceptions of African American staff, parents and students. It is also the case that a number of the aspects of 2009 climate, most notably perceptions of the consent decree and district efforts to ensure racial equity, simply were not yet salient or coherent aspects of the school climate in 2000. In other words, some of the issues and concerns that drive perceptions of the climate have certainly changed since 2000.

On those climate dimensions that were measured in both 2000 and 2009, staff and parent findings tended to change a bit more than those for students.¹⁴ Whereas in 2000 staff routinely had the most extreme views of the climate (white staff almost always had the most positive view of the climate and African American staff almost always had the most negative view), in 2009 very often it was the parents that had the most extreme views.

Changes in Staff Perceptions. On seven of eleven dimensions that were measured both in 2000 and in 2009, there was some change in staff perceptions. On two dimensions – racial fairness and qualities of desegregated schools – changes in staff perceptions tended to diminish slightly, but not eliminate the gap between African American and Whites. On both, there was no appreciable difference between African American perceptions in 2000 and in 2009. Rather, White perceptions looked more like those of African Americans in 2009 compared to 2000: there was an increase in the proportion of Whites who saw the schools as racially unfair, and, there was an increase in the proportion of Whites that believed that Champaign schools should both adopt curricula that embrace African American perspectives and achieve proportional representation of African Americans in various school roles (e.g., teacher, administrator) and programs (e.g., upper level or special education courses).

On three other dimensions – fairness general, cultural understanding, and family attributions for misbehavior – African American perceptions seem to have become more

¹⁴ For more detailed information regarding the changes over time reported in this section, please refer to the Appendices. For those dimensions measured in both 2000 and 2009, tables containing data from the 2000 survey immediately follow the 2009 table for each dimension.

divergent than in 2000, with some tending to see the climate more like their white peers and others less. On these dimensions, changes tended to reflect a decrease in the numbers of African American staff who responded in the neutral/not sure range paired with both an increase in the proportion that agreed as well as the proportion that disagreed with the dimension.

On two dimensions, African American staff saw the climate more negatively than they did in 2000. Compared to 2000, African American staff in 2009 perceived less trust and respect from colleagues and less encouragement of parent involvement by the schools. The proportion of African Americans who agreed they could trust their colleagues and felt respected by them fell from 60% in 2000 to 51% in 2009 while the proportion that disagreed rose from three percent to 17%. The proportion African American staff that disagreed that the schools encourage parent involvement rose from six percent to 18%, while the proportion of Whites who agreed that the schools encourage parent involvement rose from 74% to 88%, thus increasing the gap between African American and White perceptions on this dimension.

Finally, for staff, no appreciable differences were observed on four of eleven dimensions measured in both 2000 and 2009: experiences of racism, influence, fairness discipline, and need to address racial issues.

Changes in Parent Perceptions. Significant changes in parent perceptions were observed on half (6) of the twelve dimensions that were measured in both 2000 and 2009. African American parents rated their schools as less fair in 2009 than did parents in 2000 on all three measures of fairness – fairness general, fairness discipline and racial fairness. White parents perceived less fairness on two of three fairness dimensions – fairness discipline and racial fairness, with no change on fairness general. The proportion of African American parents who agreed or strongly agreed that discipline is administered fairly fell from 42% in 2000 to 28% in 2009, while the proportion of Whites who disagreed or strongly disagreed rose from 10 to 20%. The proportion of both African American and White parents who disagreed or strongly disagreed that the schools were racially fair rose by 12%, from 20 to 32% among African Americans, and from 6 to 18% among Whites. Perceptions of general fairness also declined for African Americans – the proportion disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that the schools are fair rose from 22 to 33% on this dimension.

Like changes in perceptions of fairness, changes on both the Qualities of Desegregated Champaign Schools and Family Attributions for Misbehavior were parallel for African American and White parents. Both groups were more likely to endorse as important or very important the ideas that Champaign schools adopt curricula that embrace African American perspectives and achieve proportional representation of African Americans in various school roles (e.g., teacher, administrator) and programs (e.g., upper level or special education courses) (71% of African Americans and 15% of Whites, up from 48 and 5% respectively in 2000), and both groups were significantly more likely to agree or strongly agree that student behavior problems at school result from problems in the family (25% of African Americans and 51% of Whites, up from 10 and 38% respectively in 2000).

African American and White parents' perceptions of School Parent Contact Discipline both changed, but in opposite directions, closing the gap between the two groups. African American perceptions became less positive (those agreeing or strongly agreeing fell from 67% to 52%) while White perceptions became less negative (those disagreeing or strongly disagreeing

fell from 18% to 5%).

Finally, no appreciable differences were observed for parent ratings on six of twelve dimensions measured in both 2000 and 2009: experiences of racism, influence, trust and respect, cultural understanding, encouragement of parent involvement, and need to address racial issues.

Changes in Middle and High School Student Perceptions. Among middle and high school students changes over time for students were generally small and in the direction of more negative perceptions of climate. For middle school students, small changes were observed on three of the five dimensions that allowed for comparison from 2000 to 2009. For high school students, slightly larger changes occurred, but on only two dimensions.

Compared to 2000, in 2009 African American middle school students were slightly more likely to perceive that student misbehavior results from families not valuing education, White middle school students were slightly more likely to agree that there was a need to address racial issues, and both African American and White students perceived slightly less racial fairness. The largest change for middle school students occurred on Experiences of Racism. In 2009, both African American and White middle school students reported more experiences of racism than in 2000. The proportion of students reporting “never” on this scale fell from 60% to 45% for African Americans and from 72% to 50% for Whites. Consistent with this, the proportion of African American students who reported such experiences “a few times” or “monthly” increased from 35% to 50% and for White students from 25% to 46%.

Compared to 2000, in 2009 both African American and White high school students perceived less racial fairness. The proportion of African American high school students who disagreed/strongly disagreed that the schools treat students of all races fairly increased from 19% to 26%, while the proportion of Whites who agreed/strongly agreed fell from 68% to 61%. A larger difference was occurred on Family Attributions for Misbehavior where the proportion of White high school students who perceived that student misbehavior results from families not valuing education increased from 26% to 43%.

Changes in 4th and 5th grade Student Perceptions. Changes over time for 4th and 5th grade students could not be examined due to changes in the items between versions.

Discussion

The findings from this study defy simple summary. Not surprisingly, given the diversity of stakeholders and the broad range of activities and settings that comprise Unit 4, experiences of the racial climate of Unit 4 schools are also diverse. Results indicate that perceptions vary – sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically – depending on the school, role (e.g., administrator, teacher, parent, student), school level (e.g., elementary, middle and high school), and race of the respondent. This variation poses both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, differences in perceptions can lead to confusion, miscommunication and misunderstanding. Each group has its own perspective and truth. On the other hand, these diverse perspectives provide fertile ground for discussion, learning and improvement of Unit 4 schools. Variation in perceptions offers multiple lenses through which to study and understand not only the social and cultural dynamics in the school buildings, but also in the teaching of literature, history, and social studies more broadly. Unit 4 stakeholders will naturally read and interpret the study findings from their own particular points of view. But we should all challenge ourselves to go further, to engage the complexity and nuance in the findings, and to use the findings to better understand multiple points of view. Acceptance of and support for efforts to improve the schools require that we do so.

The following interpretations of, and reflections on, the survey findings incorporate qualitative data gathered from two sources: written comments on the survey and post-survey stakeholder focus groups. All surveys invited participants to provide written comments concerning anything they wanted to share about the survey or diversity issues. Comments were received from 51% of 4th and 5th graders 38% of middle school and high school students, 45% of parents and 42% of staff. Following preliminary analysis of the survey findings, focus groups were held with various stakeholder groups¹⁵ during which a summary of survey findings was presented. Focus group participants were asked to react to the findings: whether they were credible, what they meant, what aspects were surprising, what questions they raised, what their implications were, and how they compared to participants' experiences.

Rather than attempt to summarize the qualitative data completely, they are used here to provide an interpretive context and to illustrate interpretations of the numerical findings. Taken together, the survey findings along with comments by many respondents begin to shed light on how to understand differences in perceptions of school climate. They also point to possible strategies for improving the racial climate in Unit 4 schools.

The majority of views of climate are positive

There were both positive and troubling signs in the study findings. First, on the positive side, the majority of staff, parents and students perceived many aspects of the climate in favorable terms, often in very favorable terms. Over 90% of middle and high school students had very positive perceptions of the likelihood of their success beyond school. A large majority of all groups (staff, parents and students) in the district felt trust for, and respect from, school staff and believed that teachers have high expectations of students. A large majority of staff and parents and a near majority of middle and high school students reported never having experienced racism

¹⁵ A dozen post-survey focus groups were held with Unit 4 administrators, principals, teachers, PTA council, the AP, Special Education, and Discipline Task Forces, Family Information Center staff, and students.

or being treated badly because of their race. The large majority of staff and parents also had a sense of belonging in their school, believed the schools are fair to all children, and that the schools encourage parents to get involved in their children’s education and in the school. Moreover, while not as high a proportion, still a majority of staff and parents believed that teachers take students’ learning styles and cultural backgrounds into account when teaching and that their opinions mattered and their ideas and suggestions influenced the operations and decision-making at their school. The majority of staff also believed that school procedures associated with discipline and special education are fair for students of all races. The majority of elementary and middle school students also believe that their schools are fair. Large numbers of participants indicated that they would be interested in working to end inequities in Champaign schools (including 62% of all staff participants, 21% of parents and 30% of middle and high school students).

Clearly, many adults and children in Unit 4 have on balance very positive views of the school climate. Many comments reflected this sentiment. Students of all races routinely commented that they loved their schools and their teachers. Many students reported feeling safe and that their teachers are caring and helpful. One parent captured the sentiment of many others when she wrote “I feel I have seen no acts of racism at both elementary [schools] that my daughter has attended. I have seen people go to great lengths to treat people of all ethnicities fairly and with respect.” This comment from an elementary school teacher reinforces this view and reflected the sentiment of most teachers:

At [my school], I think we do a great job of addressing diversity issues through a variety of means. Some of the ways in which we address diversity issues is through cultural education in the arts class and general education classrooms, by our counselor and students services coordinator addressing diversity issues through teaching social understanding lessons to classes and through forming social groups who meet weekly to help the students learn to communicate better with students who are different than themselves. [At my school] teachers and parents really work well together to promote understanding of diversity through involving parents of diverse backgrounds in school activities, and through encouraging all ... families, regardless of socioeconomic background or race, to be involved in their children’s education. I think our school really works to wrap around all students; quite well, regardless of their diversity of learning, social, and emotional needs.

Given these very positive findings, it is not surprising that less than one fifth of staff and parents perceived a need for the district to address racial issues – they simply did not perceive significant racial issues to address. Instead, they attributed purported racial disparities in discipline, upper level classes, and special education to family, neighborhood and economic conditions. Some saw the family as failing to instill a value for education. One teacher commented: “I think the majority of the problem is not race but of parents’ lack of interest in seeing their child succeed and fear that their children may surpass them.” A high school student echoed this idea: “It seems to me like the problem isn't with the school, it's how the kids were raised and how much education is stressed at home. By experience, I know that if your parents don't care about how well you do in school, it's easy for you not to care either.” Another teacher rejected the idea that a failure to value education was central but still saw another type of family failure as key: “The students who are getting suspended repeatedly or in trouble most often come

from environments in where there is a lack of discipline or accountability, not necessary one that does not value education.” Economic issues were another common explanation of presumed racial disparities as reflected in this comment by a teacher:

I believe the Champaign Unit 4 School District would benefit from focusing more on socioeconomic status rather than racism. From my observations students with the most disruptive behaviors and least value toward their education are from low socioeconomic status (REGARDLESS of being black, white, or any race for that matter). The inequities between poor families/students and wealthy families/students is easily identified, and we should spend our time, energy, and money trying to work on closing that gap.

Large and troubling racial differences in views of climate

On the negative side, as was true in 2000, African American staff, parents and students routinely perceived the climate in more negative terms than their white peers. These differences were typically large and extended across most dimensions of the climate. African American participants perceived less racial fairness, more need to address racial issues, and made less family attributions for misbehavior. Large racial differences were found on each of these dimensions in all four samples in which they were measured (staff, parents and middle and high school students).

Comments from African American students suggest that they perceive unfairness in multiple areas. Some student comments reflected concern about academic treatment and support:

I feel that some teachers don't try to make sure all races get what's going on in class. (African American female high school student)

The kids who are bad and black are usually ignored or not helped in class. (African American female high school student)

Other comments reflected concerns about discipline:

Black students are swarmed when walking the halls, but if it's a white student that's carrying books then they are not. (African American female high school student)

I feel that if a Black student goes to the office with a White person the Black person is going to get in trouble and that makes me so mad. I would know because it happened to me before. (African American elementary student)

Sometimes I might think that I'm not meant to be in this school because I've gotten in unreasonable trouble. And by certain teachers, I think I might be treated unfairly. (African American elementary student)

Still other comments reflected concerns about more general climate issues:

I feel that my teacher is so mean to us African-Americans kids and the other races get treated better. Also they compliment other students but not really African Americans. (African American elementary student)

African American staff and parent comments often reflected similar sentiments of unfairness. For example:

Why White students will always be favored, principal won't even deal with students or parents of African American. They always take White side, every time. I have experienced many many times, nothing was ever done. (African American Parent)

Staff have been subjected to documentation, scrutiny, and trendy interventions instead of real discussion on the issue at hand. Our school district is a "system" that "systematically" is biased to the "other"--non-white/poor/non-English speaking/undereducated population. (African American staff)

This district does not respect non-certified Black staff. They are underpaid, under valued, and are treated as care takers...rather than individuals that possess a vast knowledge database. This district also does not do an adequate job in the teaching of African American History, and seems to not want to acknowledge the years of oppression for Blacks. (African American staff)

Higher rates of perceived unfairness are related to higher rates of perceived need to address racial issues among African American respondents. One African American parent expressed a common concern with the slow pace of change:

When are these issues about diversity are going to end? I am a 58 yr old Black female and now I have a great niece attending school and it seem these same issues are apparent. What's up!?! (African American Parent)

An African American administrator connected the need for the district to address racial issues to the need to address racial issues in the broader community and society:

... we CANNOT change a racist school district while we live within a RACIST society. Those hard discussions need to happen, people need to be more aware, racists need to be exposed and disposed, and quality resources need to be put into place in a comprehensive manner looking at long-term goals in conjunction with the community! (African American Administrator)

Other African American staff expressed specific changes that they believed were needed:

There are not nearly enough adult people of color in this school. Sometimes kids relate better to people who look like them. (African American staff)

I believe that most teachers are sympathetic instead empathetic and that because of this they are giving students crutches (temporary fixes) instead of teaching them how to find

alternate ways to complete tasks within their limitations (use of available resources). (African American staff)

... talks on diversity should not be optional. Simply stating that we are all the same is too fluff for adults. While some of this is true, and is acceptable for 2nd grade curriculum, it is simply too juvenile a concept to be adopted by the faculty in any sense (race, learning ability). It should be policy to learn and speak about the overall differences and attitudes of all cultures. This may help teachers decipher true misbehaviors from cultural generalities. (African American staff)

... I know that not all white people are racist and not all black people are treated unfairly. I feel that Unit 4 has shined a light on many things that can go wrong in a district if left unaddressed. Teachers need support to teach and students need support to learn from all interested persons in the learning community. (African American staff)

Differences in perceptions of unfairness and in need to address racial issues appear to serve as the foundation for a far more general pattern. Recall that on 17 of the 21 (81%) climate dimensions measured for staff, 15 of the 21 measured for parents, and, six of nine measure for middle and high school students, African Americans perceived the climate more negatively than their White peers.

Changes in climate from 2000 to 2009

The quantitative data obtained from the Climate Survey suggest that the gaps in perceptions of climate among White and African American staff members have narrowed some. The general pattern of change for White staff from 2000 to 2009 was toward more negative perceptions of the climate; toward perceptions more similar to those of African Americans (in both 2000 and 2009). Compared to perceptions of White staff in 2000 which were generally very positive, White staff in 2009 perceived less trust and respect from colleagues, less racial fairness, more need to address racial issues, less fairness in discipline and were more supportive of adopting features of schools that promote African American achievement. Statistically, the perceptions of White staff members appear more similar to their African American counterparts. However, thematic analyses of the open ended, qualitative responses suggest that these perceptions are driven by experiences that are different from those of African American staff members. Three key domains can be discerned where shift towards similar perceptions might be suggestive of differential interpretation of racial fairness, rather than moderation of views – colorblind ideology, frustration with discipline procedures, and perceived reverse discrimination.

Colorblind Ideology: As was true in 2000, the perceptions of White staff members around issues of race in schools continue to reflect strong expressions of colorblind ideology. A significant proportion of responses echo the idea that race should not be taken into consideration in the school context. The most common form of this is the expressed need to focus on *all kids* rather than a particular race. Comments also reflected resentment against what is perceived as overemphasis of one race (Black) over/at the expense of others. Finally, problems, if any, were located within low socio-economic status rather than race. Thus, while staff members did not deny that problems exist within schools, there was considerable consensus that the focus on

racial inequities was not appropriate. The following comments by a White staff member illustrate the colorblind ideology influencing staff members' perceptions of racial issues:

Teaching is not about the "bubble" kids. It is teaching ALL students.

This district places too much emphasis on race and not enough on individual accomplishments and concerns. Race is but one factor in a child's life, and to continue to focus on it to the exclusion of all else as it has been limits the child irrevocably. Each child is more than his/her race. To continue a policy that encourages racism in either direction should be a concern for everyone.

I believe that Champaign Schools should stop paying so much attention to race and concern themselves with what a child's needs are!!!!!!!

In my experience the expectations of behavior are the same for all students. The reason more Black students are suspended is due to the fact that they violate the codes of conduct more frequently.

Frustration with Discipline Procedures. A significant proportion of the White staff members who responded to the open-ended questions felt that African American kids “get away with more”. There was the perception that African American kids are not disciplined in situations where they should be. This leniency was directly attributed to consent decree policies. Finally, there was also the sentiment that White kids are disciplined more than African American kids for the same problems. The following comment by a staff member illustrates this sentiment:

Black students are given too much lenience in disciplining because it looks bad for you school when too many behavior problems are documented for the black students. The students know that they won't get into trouble for not following school rules and the white kids know that the black kids get away with things that they do not.

Perceived 'Reverse Discrimination' and 'Reverse Racism.' There were a range of responses suggesting that the consent decree and its implementation has led to White students and staff being treated unfairly on a host of domains. Thus, White staff members do feel that there are discrepancies between Black and White students/staff in terms of expectations and consequences for actions. However they feel that it is the White staff and students that are getting the shorter end of the stick. Some of the typical responses suggesting this perception are:

I feel that black students get treated better than white students. Black student do not get into trouble for not bringing back assignments while white students grades get lowered. It seems black students are getting the answers to the tests, while white students are never helped by the teachers, because they are to busy dealing with discipline problems in the classroom.

Though I am sure that when the Consent Decree came into effect in this school district there was a great degree of discrimination against minorities occurring in the district, I feel that it has gotten to the point that there is a great deal of discrimination against the white students and staff is occurring today.

Racism in our school is directly toward whites!

Consent Decree as Backdrop

Throughout both pre- and post-survey focus groups, conversations about the racial climate in Unit 4 routinely turned to the Consent Decree. More than any other single factor, the experience of responding to the consent decree has powerfully shaped perceptions of the racial climate in Unit 4 schools. This fact also constitutes the most prominent change in the racial climate since 2000. Whereas in 2000 the consent decree was not yet in place, in 2009 nearly all adult participants reported being aware of the consent decree (99% of staff and 81% of parents) and a large majority felt well-informed about it (73% of staff and 57% of parents).¹⁶

Evaluations of the Merits of the Consent Decree. Often conversations and written comments about the Consent Decree focused on evaluations of its impact and merit. Many participants believed that on balance the consent decree was a failure.

I do think that the Consent Decree has resulted in more distrust, lower academic standards all across the board, and a reduction in resources available to help students.

I thought the consent decree was to bring about a change in the racial climate, but I do not see that. I see changes, such as more white families choosing private school and enrollment going down and that makes the number game more complex.

While very few viewed the Consent Decree as uniformly positive, it is also true that few viewed it as uniformly negative. As just one example of this mixed assessment, one teacher commented:

I do believe that the consent decree has helped move more A[fri]c[A]m[A]erican students into upper level classes, and that needed to be done. [But] we should never have included discipline numbers in the charge of the decree. I believe that if we had concentrated on moving students into the higher level classes, but kept the discipline strong with real consequences, we would have even higher numbers of A[fri]c[A]m[A]erican students moving up. They cannot excel if they are late to every class of the day.

Some did feel that the consent decree was aimed at legitimate concerns but that it had gone wrong and was not actually addressing or helping those problems with which it was concerned.

I was a big supporter of the Consent Decree (CD) at its inception. However, over time it has become a force of harm rather than one of good. Its goals of eliminating disparities in honors class enrollment has been a huge positive, however, other areas have come to overwhelm the good in this area.

¹⁶ Information about awareness of the consent decree was not obtained from students.

While for many there was clear ambivalence about the impact of the consent decree, there was very little regarding whether the consent decree should be continued.¹⁷ Both staff and parents overwhelmingly agreed that the problems of racial discrimination in Unit 4 schools did not need continued court involvement. Fewer than one in ten staff and fewer than one in five parents believed there was such a need. Not only was there agreement that the consent decree should end, but also many felt it should never have been put in place. For every staff member or parent who believed that it was appropriate, there was another who did not and another who was neutral or not sure whether it was appropriate for the legal system ever to have been involved in ensuring racial fairness in the Champaign Schools. Comments on surveys and in the follow-up focus groups suggested that stakeholders of all types were worn out by the consent decree and the focus on race. They wanted little more than “to get out from under it” and “to move on.” These sentiments appear to be rooted, at least to some extent, in perceptions that the consent decree had significant negative consequences and the district had been making too much of racial issues.

Negative Consequences of the Consent Decree - Discipline. Perceptions that the consent decree produced negative consequences were not uncommon. Roughly one out of three parents and one out of five staff members believed this to be true. As one teacher noted: “Although it [the Consent Decree] has brought awareness and solutions to a few issues, it has created more problems than it has solved for ALL of our students.”

By far the most common concern was the perceived negative impact on discipline in the district. One teacher’s comments captured a common view of this problem:

I have watched discipline deteriorate under the consent decree. Each year is worse. The statistics won’t show it, because we don’t report infractions as we used to do. Now, the tone for class to begin seems to be just a hint to go to class. Students blatantly disregard instructions to clear the hall. From my supervision desk, I can say with great certainty that during my period, the tardy students are almost all A[fri]c[A]m[A]r[A]n students and in increasingly large numbers and increasingly late—often 20 or 30 minutes tardy. Teachers are told to count the students present if they appear 5 minutes before the end of class. We certainly have not served these students well by not disciplining them as we did in the past. We are not preparing them for life after high school. I think that is racism at its worst and it was caused by the consent decree.

Another teacher offered a parallel narrative:

... the discipline system at Centennial is essentially non-existent. We allow students (of all races, but especially black students) to get away with so much for fear of "running up the numbers." Students are very smart and will push as far as we'll let them. We now have a building where students are arriving tardy to class, cursing at staff members in the hallway, blatantly ignoring reasonable requests, and complete disregard for policies (cell phones, iPods, hats, etc.) is the rule, not the exception. Unfortunately, the majority

¹⁷ The survey data reported here were collected before Judge McDade retired the consent decree in the fall of 2009.

of these incidents occur with black students. However, staff members have simply given up attempts to enforce the rules or have come to expect being talked to rudely because any complaints or referrals raise questions about their racial sensitivity.

The most common interpretation offered for why discipline has deteriorated under the consent decree are new policies that aimed to reduce racial disparities by changing and constraining the administration of discipline. Teachers appear to have interpreted messages from the central administration to mean that they are not to discipline African American students. This has happened either indirectly as suggested by this certified staff:

I sometimes feel uncomfortable reporting a black student's misbehavior. On the one hand, the rules should apply equally to everyone. On the other hand, every time we report the misbehavior, it adds a strike mark to the school's record.

Or directly, as a member of the Discipline Equity Task Force said: “Orders came down not to write DRs [discipline referrals] – no wonder the numbers improved!” And as another teacher said: “it’s not that teachers aren’t disciplining, it’s when they do nothing gets done.” Many students have come to similar conclusions. As one high school student observed: “Black kids get too many chances and are given too many breaks. It’s no wonder why they have horrible behavior, they never get punished.”

Middle and high school teachers generally expressed considerable frustration with their inability to effectively discipline students. And there is pressure to change discipline practices back to the way they used to be before the consent decree. Along these lines one teacher commented: “I hope that we can become color blind here and when a student acts like this, they are sent home as they used to be. This should be done fairly and consistently with all students regardless of race.” Another teacher similarly said:

It doesn't matter if the teacher is white or black, kids treat the teachers with the same level of disrespect ... that's probably the biggest problem we have here ... we have the war against disrespect going on right now in our school ... it's to the point now if a student is outright blatantly disrespectful they will spend three days in school jail – room 107, first time, no questions asked. The second time they are out suspended for 3 days.

Several teachers suggested that discipline policies driven by the consent decree were misguided. A common expression of this was:

I believe the District went about attacking the discipline problems in our schools all wrong. Instead of looking at what we were allowing white students to "get away with" that we were punishing black students for and doing something to raise the bar for white students, we decided to allow black students to "get away with" more.

Another teacher similarly suggested: “Folks missed the fact that white students ‘get a pass’ where African American students don’t – maybe all kids need more discipline.”

The perceived breakdown in discipline has led to charges of unfairness toward white

students and so-called “reverse discrimination.” As one student commented:

I frequently feel as though African American students get treated better than students of other races because of the consent decree. I feel as though some African American students feel entitled to special treatment because of what happened in the past.

A teacher echoed this idea: “What has happened in this district is that African American students have been given unfair advantages, not white students.” For some, this idea generalized beyond discipline. In their view, the consent decree led to the establishment of broad based unfair advantages for African American students. For example one non-certified staff opined:

I don't understand why the black students get a special day for parents to come visit there class (NAAPID), and none of the other races, (white, asian, native american, etc..) get a special day. All parents should have a special day to come visit there students also. UPWARD bound also targets black students also, what about all the other underprivileged students that go to school here and are not black? We also have an AVID program that is predominately black. Everything has been changed that black students are to be allowed in everything, but we have special dances for the blacks and white students aren't included, they have a black talent show. Any other active all students are to be included, except for these, it sounds like reverse discrimination to me.... I have never really understood the consent decree, because no one has ever really explained it to me.

Negative Consequences of the Consent Decree - Access to Upper Level Classes. After the negative impact of the consent decree on discipline, access to upper level classes was perhaps the second most frequently cited concern. It is worth noting that many viewed increased access to such courses as a very positive outcome. As one teacher expressed: “... [the consent decree] goals of eliminating disparities in honors class enrollment has been a huge positive.” Another concurred: “Any child, regardless of race, who has the ability to enroll in an honors or AP course should be allowed to do so. If the child thinks he can do the work, he should be allowed to do so.” But others expressed concern that standards have been lowered: “Standards for gifted should not be lowered and standards for SPED should not be raised to make our numbers look better.” And, many teachers reported that they thought efforts to increase the number of African American students in upper level classes hurts some (inappropriately placed) students.

I believe that the consent decree has tied our hands as teachers. We have student placed in classes that are above their ability level purely to meet quotas. That does NOT benefit the students.

Another teacher expanded on this idea:

I think our school is trying too hard to up the number of African American students in Level 3 courses and this hurts these students. I have one African American student that always comes to mind with this discussion because she is currently failing my level 3 class and will be lucky to get a D, but if she had been in the regular level course this year instead of the accelerated one, she would be able to get a B in the course. She's bright,

she's just not at the level of the rest of the class. I have four other African American students in that class and they all belong there... one of them is one the brightest kids in the class so I'm glad that counselors, teachers, and parents are encouraging students to take the higher level courses, but at the same time, previous grades need to be addressed. The student I mentioned before switched from level 3 to level 2 last year and still ended up failing the course and then was placed back in level 3 this year. In my mind that does nothing but harm the student. I've had students in the past who received a B in a level 2 class and yet were placed in level 3 the following year. In my opinion, if a student can't get an A in level 2, you don't move him or her up to level 3 regardless of race.

Still other teachers viewed the paper work associated with upper level classes as a problem.

I find it insulting that I have to explain if more AA students get low grades than white students. I do not grade their tests or assessment s any differently than I do other students in the class. And

In addition, the amount of paperwork that is being demanded from teachers is taking away critical time that teachers could spend planning and responding to student work. Too much valueable time is being wasted on unnecessary paperwork.

Negative Consequences of the Consent Decree – Special Education. Amongst those who wrote about special education, the feeling seemed unanimous that African American students who need special services are often refused them in order to “present good numbers”. Staff wrote that many students were not even tested because of a concern to not over-represent African American students in special education. Overall, the consent decree policies around special education, in particular the attention to “quotas”, were felt to have failed. The following staff quotes illustrate this view:

Some AA students are being hurt by the very people/policies that are being designed to help them. There are students who need to be tested and receive services who are being denied the opportunity, therefore not getting the help that they need.

We have students who need more help that do not get it because it might LOOK bad.

Negative Consequences of the Consent Decree – “Diversity Hires.” Although expressed less frequently than concerns about discipline and upper level courses, multiple concerns were raised about hiring practices under the consent decree. One teacher summarized the concern: “... with the consent decree we made an effort to hire African American teachers just because they were African American, not because of their skill level. A couple of them were so bad that when they knew the consent decree was going to end they fired them.... They are called ‘diversity hires.’” A parent echoed this concern: “It seems that the district cares MORE about hiring school administrators and principals by the color of their skin then by their professional qualifications.”

While concerns that the consent decree had negative consequences were not uncommon,

it is important to bear in mind that only about one third of parents and one fifth of staff actively agreed with this dimension of the climate. Roughly equal proportions actively disagreed that that the consent decree had negative consequences (about one fifth of parents and one third of staff). The largest proportion, roughly half, of both groups reported that they were neutral or not sure. The meaning of these neutral/not sure responses were of much interest to stakeholders and these quantitative findings provoked comments from many in the focus groups. One perspective, captured best by a central administrator, was a sense of relief and gratification at the low proportion of staff that perceived negative consequences of the consent decree. A more common reaction – one expressed by other administrators, members of task forces and most strongly by teachers – was skepticism that the proportion of staff that saw negative consequences was actually so low. As one noted “[It’s] surprising [the large proportion of neutral/not sure responses] because people have such strong opinions about the consent decree ... I don’t know why there is that, I don’t know, I don’t know....” When teachers were asked how to make sense of the neutral/not sure responses one said “I don’t think the staff is this unsure about the consent decree ... I have not talked to one person in the district who thinks the consent decree was a good thing, including the superintendent ... it was the greatest day in the history of the district when the consent decree ended.” Others readily agreed, and believed that staff were holding back their true feelings. As one said: “from my perspective, I would say chunk the neutral into agree ... I think (before the consent decree was declared done) folks didn’t want to agree because they didn’t want to look bad....” A teacher who served on one of the equity task forces expressed a similar sentiment and interpreted the pressure to hold back on expressing true feelings as the reason for the low participation rate of teachers. She said that she knew that a number of teachers at her school did not complete the survey because they did not trust their responses would be kept confidential. She also believed that many neutral and not sure responses were driven by the same concern. She believed that the truth at her school was that among White teachers there were significantly more perceptions that the consent decree produced negative consequences than was reflected in the survey findings.

Based on the written comments on the surveys and the focus group discussions, it is clear that some neutral/not sure responses came from participants who really saw more negative consequences than they were willing to report. However, there was also ample evidence from comments that neutral/not sure responses reflected in part that some people saw both positive and negative consequences of the consent decree. Analysis of the individual items that comprised the Consent Decree Negative Consequences scale suggested that mixed positive and negative feelings were likely the primary explanation for the high level of neutral/not sure responses at the scale level.¹⁸ Of course, persons whose scale response was neutral for this reason, none-the-less did see some negative consequences, indicating that the majority of participants saw at least some negative consequences.

Perceived Positive Changes in the District during the Consent Decree. It is important to note too that some stakeholders viewed the consent decree on balance to have been positive. One teacher noted: “Since I last took this survey, the learning environment in the schools has changed... The teachers and administration in this building work hard with students and their

¹⁸ This analysis revealed that neutral/not sure responses to individual items occurred with much less frequency (at an average rate of only 16.5%) than at the level of the scale (about 50%). This suggests a pattern of mixed or ambivalent responding based on seeing both positive and negative consequences depending on item.

parents to insure that race is not the issue.” Another agreed and stated: “Overall, I think our district treats staff and students fairly and we have come a long way on understanding cultural differences....”

Making too much of Race. Slightly less than a third of all staff and parents agreed that Unit 4, in responding to the consent decree, has overemphasized or made too much of race. For many survey participants, such perceptions were tied to evaluations of the merits of the consent decree. Comments from participants illustrated this link in different ways. One commonly articulated version focused on the financial cost of the consent decree. As one high school student commented “They need to stop wasting money over that stupid lawsuit. Race does not matter!”

Another link between too much attention to race and negative consequences of the consent decree focused on the educational costs for students who are not African American. One staff person captured this notion this way: “... there has been too much emphasis put on the achievement of black children AT THE EXPENSE of the education of children of other races.” Additional comments reflecting this perspective and that advocate for color blindness, included the following:

There seems to be a focus on improving outcomes for just African American students. I realize that this stems from the origin of the consent decree; however, I feel that this sends the wrong message - that maybe other ethnic minority groups are not as important. That is a problem in my opinion, and only serves to perpetuate the original issues. Efforts should be targeted to improve outcomes for ALL minority students in the district, not just African American students.

I look forward to a day when not only the schools but our society at large can be “color blind”. I feel that at this point we are putting an unnatural focus on African American to the detriment of other group who are vulnerable to being disenfranchised, such as Latinos (who have the highest drop out rate). Is not the dream to be judged by a man’s character and not the color of his skin? ... It is imperative that we include all races and people in the curriculum. If the CD continues it will create more of a divide and continue racial tension and the forced looking at “groups” rather then (sic) individuals.

This district places too much emphasis on race and not enough on individual accomplishments and concerns. Race is but one factor in a child's life, and to continue to focus on it to the exclusion of all else as it has been limits the child irrevocably. Each child is more than his/her race. To continue a policy that encourages racism in either direction should be a concern for everyone.

Diversity issues should be presented by the administration inclusive all issues, economic class, white vs. black, sexual orientation issues, this survey is an example of bad public outreach and we need to stop breading this type of questions. This survey is a disservice to our community.

Some perceptions that the district has made too much of race appear to derive from the view that we live (or should live) in a post-racial society where the problem of race has been, for

all intents and purposes, solved, and that focusing on race creates problems that need not exist. Central administrators expressed concern in their focus group that any staff person in Unit 4 might think this is true. But, while more staff disagreed that this was true (45%), nearly one third (30%) agreed with the idea. As one high school student said “We’re fine. Let’s move on.” Another similar expression came from a school building administrator who wrote: “As long as we continue to focus on race, we will never become equal, and racism will continue to be a problem, and Martin Luther King's dream will never become a reality.”

Many participants expressed the view that most problems presumed to be due to race actually are not, but rather are due to other factors such as socioeconomic status or other problems in the family. Three examples of such views follow.

I can't speak for all classrooms or teachers, but I feel this district is very responsive to rumors and does not always seek out truth. This district jumps to conclusions based on numbers instead of spending time in the classrooms to see what the numbers really mean.

Both students and teachers discuss and acknowledge overtly that the issues at our school are NOT about race. They are about the choices of individuals. The color of a student's skin has no bearing on his/her behavior, nor the perception of his/her behavior by others.

I feel the challenges experienced by many of our students are not related to their race but to their socioeconomic status (i.e. living in poverty, without basic resources, without positive male role models, absence of key family members/living with relatives or foster parents instead of their parents).

Finally, a group of high performing high school students struggled in one of the focus groups to make sense of whether too much has been made of race. Their conversation points to the need for guided dialogue and discussion around race.

White male: [I'm] not saying that we are using too many resources, but the more you make an issue out of something [race], the more obvious it is going to be...

African American female: but people need to know about it, nothing has been done ...

White female: My sister is 30 and she went to Central and when she was here I don't think race was that big of problem, she had black friends and nobody made a big deal about it, there wasn't this fussing that oh we need to fix it ... there wasn't these racial slurs all the time ... the school district wasn't trying to fix racism, like it wasn't that big of a deal, and I feel like it was better back then when they weren't making such a big deal out of it, I just feel like it just kinda fixed it in itself...

African American female: nothing is going to fix their problems now ...

White female: I think the wrong people might be trying to fix it ... like the school board ... I don't personally know, well I know a couple of them, but you could be having racist people trying to fix this ... And the people that are trying to fix it aren't walking through

our halls everyday, sitting in our classrooms, doing anything ... I definitely don't think that a group of people who do not witness what I witness everyday, what you witness everyday, that are walking through the halls, that are in classrooms, that are seeing the fights at the park, I don't think that they can tell us how our school needs to be run because they don't go here, they don't experience what we experience, they don't see things first hand....

Problems with Racism

One finding more than any other cheered focus group respondents – the high proportion of staff, parents and students who reported that they never or only a few times had experienced racism or been made to feel bad about their race at school. Central administrators, principals, PTA council members and a number of task force members all remarked about how glad they were about these findings. For the most part, these stakeholders paid little if any attention to the relatively small proportion of each sample that reported these experiences on a monthly or more frequent basis. Only one administrator expressed concern over the roughly one fifth to one quarter of middle and high school students who reported these experiences on a monthly or more frequent basis.

By contrast, most teachers, particularly middle and high school teachers, were surprised and somewhat puzzled by these findings. They expected the numbers to be a good bit higher, and they wondered about how respondents were defining racism.

Students were incredulous on seeing these findings. One high school student remarked: “where are these kids from?” Other students readily agreed that the findings did not square with their experiences at their high school. One white female, intending to underscore how common racist experiences were in her school commented: “[It’s] not just black on white or white on black, racism isn’t only across race, it is within race too, there are white people who will call me a white bitch.” Trying to make sense of the low rates of reported acts of racism, these high school students reasoned that survey participants must have been reserving the term racism for more extreme acts of physical violence or “they are experiencing things but not interpreting them as racism – they don’t take it that way.”

In the middle school focus group similar sentiments were expressed. One student offered: “Every race is racist to each other, it is not just white people talking about black people. Everybody talks about everybody.”

When queried about what constituted racism in their eyes, students struggled and ultimately failed to come to consensus. Both middle and high school students had the most agreement that overt and malicious racial slurs and name-calling were racist. But, they also noted that there is a lot of racialized banter in their schools, some of it intended as humor, and that distinguishing humor from insult was hard to do. One middle school student reported that students are racist toward each other, but in “a friendly manner!” People know they are joking, he said, but still it might considered racism: “Everyday you might hear something racist in the hallway, but no one cares because they know they are just kidding around.” Others chimed in that there are moments when the jokes go too far and become hurtful. Similarly they noted that because it is often difficult to discern another’s motives, it is often difficult to know whether bad

treatment by another has anything to do with race and/or racism.

For the most part, references to racism in written comments and focus group discussions revolved around interpersonal relations, how one individual treated another. One member of a task force noted with interest that many students readily identify racial unfairness in discipline and other treatment but they do not connect this to racism. The evidence that many see racial unfairness suggested to her that larger numbers of folks perceive institutional racism than label it as such and/or more so than would be comfortable labeling it as such.

It is likely that racism as interpersonal mistreatment on the basis of race was the most common meaning that survey participants had in mind when they responded to the three items on the experiences of racism scale: (a) How often has a teacher treated you badly because of your race? (b) How often has a student treated you bad because of your race? and, (c) How often have you experienced racism at your school? This appears to be the definition of racism that this parent had in mind: “I feel I have seen no acts of racism at both elementary that my daughter has attended. I have seen people go to great lengths to treat people of all ethnicities fairly and with respect.”

Using this same definition, students (particularly high school students) identified numerous teachers who the students believed were racist. Several teachers were named repeatedly. A small sample of this type of comment suggests that high visibility instances of mistreatment could lead to larger numbers of students being able to indicate that there is racial unfairness than might indicate that they themselves were victims of interpersonal racism.

There is a teacher who needs to get fired. He calls kids trash and curses at kids and everybody files incident reports on him ([teacher’s name]).

The teachers make smart comments to black kids like “you’re the reason why black people make it nowhere but prison or dead.” The teacher who teaches [subject.]

Some teachers ([teacher’s name]) in the earlier education belittle people and that sticks with them for a long time if not forever.

Some comments took the concept of racism beyond interpersonal relations. One such comment by a staff member appeared to take issue with any treatment of individuals as members of their racial group.

Are all A[fri]c[A]n students from the same family background? By putting the emphasis on the group, one detracts from the unique circumstance of the individual. That is what I call racism.

Another comment by a staff member described structural racism:

There is something in the Champaign School District that can be called structural racism, which doesn’t require any individual principal or counselor or teacher or anyone else to have malign intent. Nevertheless, there is a conspiracy of forces, of assumptions, of attitudes, of behaviors, which end up with the result that blacks get the short end of the

stick.

The most common references to the terms “racism” and “racist” that appeared in participants’ written comments appeared to derive from a valuing of color-blind ideology. Perhaps the most frequent of this type focused on the survey itself. Many (mostly, but not exclusively White) students suggested that the survey was racist because it called attention to African American experiences. Such comments appeared to be examples of application of color-blind ideology that suggested that any consideration of race in policy, practice or interpretation amounts to racism. To acknowledge race from this point of view, to suggest that it has any power, is tantamount to perpetuating racism. This point of view often took the form of complaints about so-called “reverse racism,” or instances where policies or practices that aim to advance the interests and standing of African Americans were viewed as an unfair attack on the rights and interests of others.

While less common than was true in the 2000 climate survey, there were numerous comments on the 2009 survey that indicated that staff felt that efforts to identify and eliminate racial unfairness in Unit 4 amounted to an accusation of racism against them. Concerns about being labeled racist run extremely deep. Such concerns foster a climate in which it is very difficult to engage discussions of race and racism. Combined with a prevalent view of racism as deliberate and consciously motivated interpersonal mistreatment, opportunities to explore the variety of conceptualizations of racism (e.g., silent racism, reverse racism, aversive racism, institutional racism, etc.) become more difficult to take up.

Talking about race

Difficulties talking about race. Indeed, from fears of revealing one’s ignorance and/or being labeled a racist, to concerns about political correctness, to widespread adherence to color-blind ideology, there are many factors that survey participants identified that make talking about race difficult. As one principal noted: “folks have an ‘innate’ distrust for surveys anyway, and the focus on race inhibits people from being honest.” Members of the PTA council talked openly about their perceptions that many parents, staff and children in Unit 4 are simply not comfortable talking about race.

There was some support for this point of view in the survey findings. Only 42% of all parents actively agreed that they were comfortable talking about race. Higher proportions of staff (59%) reported feeling comfortable talking about race and racial issues in their school, but this still left a large proportion 41% who were not comfortable or were neutral/not sure. One such staff person commented:

Diversity is hot topic issue. In reality, there is so much baggage surrounding the issue that it is hard to discuss in an open and non-threatening setting. I think we all need to be pushed to think about our own thoughts and biases about race and discuss how to better help all our students regardless of racial makeup.

Some teachers in the focus groups thought the actual rate of discomfort among staff was likely to be higher than was reported. The difficulties around being able to talk about race can impede efforts to address racial disparities and to relate and work across racial boundaries.

Students' comments reflected a wide range of difficulties they experience when they try to talk about race: "White kids are called racist any time race is discussed at all with most African Americans." "When race comes up I often don't like to talk about it at times, I don't want to offend anyone." "When I talk about race, people think I'm racist." "Talking about race will always start a verbal fight if not a physical one."

There are some signs that one positive affect of the consent decree has been that it has made discussions of race more common and a bit easier to have. Administrators expressed the belief that defensiveness among staff to talking about racial issues has dissipated over the course of the consent decree to the point where now "people are more willing to have these important discussions, and to make change and to accept responsibility," even while at the same time "when you say the words 'consent decree' they see that as something punitive and some assessment of their character that is negative."

But many think we need to talk more about race and racism. Indeed, when asked whether there is a need for more discussion of diversity related issues, over 40% of both staff and parents agreed. There was even more support for discussing racism, at least when the job falls to administrators. When asked whether it is important for district administrators to talk about racism to help work through or solve problems, over two thirds of both staff and parents agreed. One teacher, in reflecting on the need to talk about race and racism, expressed the desire that such talk might help to bring people together.

We need to talk about racism more, but in my opinion, we need to employ a different strategy. I would like to see us begin to address race issues from a perspective of bringing us together rather than harp on inequalities. The truth is most of us make a conscious choice to treat the kids fairly. When we harp on inequalities, some of us get bitter and therefore the very nature of the message is corrupted. Rather than create an environment of equality, we create an environment in which we walk on egg shells hoping not to offend the other.... especially if they are black. The message is pure in heart but corrupt in delivery.

Students generally decried the lack of opportunity to discuss race. As one student said, "You should be allowed to discuss your opinions on race or diversity without getting kicked out of class." Written comments from African American elementary students might be read as expressing a similar desire for opportunity to deal with race. A number of them experienced the survey as an opportunity to express themselves, for which they were grateful:

I think this is a very interesting and neat survey. I had a great time taking this survey also.

I think this survey makes me a person who has freedom of expression. I want to say how I feel!!!

This survey was very interesting. Some of them are a little personal. But I like the idea of the survey.

Thank you. I needed to get that out.

This survey really helped me speak my mind without speaking it out loud. So thank you for the survey because I had a lot of things to get off my mind.

Hello, U of I people ... thank you. I got to express my feelings. I have a lot of feelings about each teacher in this school ...

It is worth noting that very virtually no white students made these kinds of comments. This issue appeared to be more salient to African American students and to reflect a greater need for them. That more African American than White students expressed gratitude and relief at having the opportunity to express themselves suggests that perhaps they do not feel the same opportunity to do so in school that White students do.

Many student comments, by raising questions or revealing confusion about various racial issues, suggest indirectly that students need more opportunities to discuss and learn about race and racism.

Why would y'all want to know about racism? That's so stupid. This test is racist.

Why is it okay to have African American Club but racist for a white club? These are NOT fair situations.

Why are these directed towards Blacks, put some questions about white people. Race isn't an issue until you bring this crap up.

White power.

Decades of research in psychology and anthropology suggest that everyone's view of the world is influenced by race, whether or not we recognize and acknowledge it. Thus, acknowledging that we are all racial is a key to opening an honest, constructive conversation about race. John Hartigan, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Texas and a proponent of this view has argued:

We live in a very individualistic society. When people, particularly whites, see themselves strictly as individuals and not as belonging to larger collectives, their ability to see race as permeating their social landscape is profoundly inhibited.

The constantly changing conventions of how race is discussed in the news fuels this hypersensitivity around race that permeates American culture. In that sense, racism is not as much of a problem as are the cultural taboos around talking about race. We are so concerned about transgressing etiquette that we spend little time formulating new ways of talking about race.

Teacher preparedness for diversity. While many students comments suggested that they would value more opportunities to discuss race and racial issues, at the same time, on balance,

students' survey responses and comments suggested that they believed the staff generally are not well prepared to lead them in such discussion. One student wrote, "When teachers talk about race they should be more careful about it." Survey findings corroborate this view. Only about one third of high school students and slightly more (38%) middle school students agreed that their teachers were well prepared to understand and teach students of all races, and that the teachers prepared students to talk about race and made it easy to talk about race in class.

These findings parallel those of African American staff and parents who generally felt that Unit 4 teachers do not show cultural understanding in their teaching, despite the fact that most White parents, and White teachers themselves think that they do. One focus group student's comments challenged teachers' perceptions of their own high level of cultural understanding.

... teachers say they thought they were pretty good at being fair with people and understanding of their background,[but] teachers wouldn't understand unless they came from that place so they can have some idea of how it would be like to live in a less fortunate area. If they didn't grow up there, they wouldn't know how it was like to live there. They (teachers) can say, 'oh, yeah I understand,' but they really have no clue. And you can think it is like that, but if you actual live there it is completely different than just the thought of it ...

Staff perceived that they are well prepared to teach students of all races. In keeping with White staff perceptions that they do a good job taking students' learning styles and cultural background into account when teaching, nearly nine in ten staff reported that they feel well prepared to teach students of all races. However, only 58% of staff felt well prepared *by the district* to do so, and only 46% felt prepared by the district to talk about race with their students. This combination of findings suggests that some teachers do not connect what it means to be prepared to teach students of all races well with being able to talk with students about race. One administrator commented along these lines suggesting that teachers seem to "disconnect racial issues from training and educational issues that may impact race. Racial issues to teachers may be black and white kids fighting, or something major ..."

Thus, while most stakeholders acknowledged a wide range of impediments to talking about race and racial issues, a large group (not quite half) saw the need for more discussion of diversity and racism in Unit 4 and their schools. Moreover, while staff felt well prepared to teach students from diverse backgrounds well, many did not attribute their readiness to district initiatives to prepare them, and many did not appear to see the connection between being able talk about race with students and being able to teach minority students well. Based on this pattern of findings, especially together with findings that many believe the district has made too much of race, it is not obvious that staff and parents would endorse the need for staff to receive more professional development training to deal with diversity issues. Yet they did.

Professional Development

Perceived need for more professional development to deal with diversity. Survey findings as well as written and focus group comments indicate broad support for the idea that staff would benefit from continued training to teach African American and other students from

diverse backgrounds well. Student perceptions supported this need – only about one third of all middle and high school students reported feeling that their teachers were well prepared to deal with diversity. Well over half of all staff and nearly half of all parents agreed more diversity focused professional development was a good idea. This sentiment was even higher among African American staff (78% agreed) and parents (80%). As one staff member commented: “More training is needed, so that teachers are more prepared to teach diverse cultures effectively.”

Generally, focus group participants were encouraged by these findings. One administrator remarked: “Many school staff sincerely want to know how best to serve diverse students.” Another noted: “... I can remember five years ago them [teachers] saying ‘We have had enough diversity training, that is too boring, we’ve been there, that is a waste of our time....’” The principals agreed. To corroborate this finding, they pointed to the relatively large numbers of teachers (300 or so) who had signed up to participate in the “climate and culture” professional development sessions in the 2009-10 school year. A nonacademic staff member who was also a focus group participant suggested that in addition to teachers, nonacademic staff would both like and would benefit from more professional development in this area as well.

Still, not all staff supported the need for professional development in this area. Participants in the principals’ focus group agreed that older teachers were probably over-represented among the nearly one in five staff members who did not see the need for diversity-focused professional development. These principals wondered if low evaluations of past trainings might explain why some staff did not support the need for more. A young African American teacher also pointed to the importance of age in thinking about professional development:

I’m waiting on more people of my generation to become employed in Unit 4. Racism dies slowly with each generation due to experience, relationships, cultural awareness, and racial anthropology learned on the college level. I think training is only helpful when it is realistic.

While there was broad support for professional development that would help teachers to teach African American and other students from diverse backgrounds well, there were diverse opinions expressed about what form such training should take and what kind of content it should cover. Comments from teachers suggest that views of what kind of professional development would be useful follow their broader views about how race and culture matter in the climate of the schools and in schooling more generally. On average, those who were most supportive of more professional development also tended to see the need to address racial issues and the need for more discussion of race at their schools. At the same time, however, among those staff members who believe their school would benefit from diversity related professional development, nearly one in five also believed that the district has made too much of race in its response to the consent decree, and 12% disagree that there is a need to talk more about race at their schools.

Respondents’ reactions to past training are instructive. A number of teachers separated race and racism from the idea of learning to teach students of diverse backgrounds well. A few examples of these types of views follow:

I believe that specific training in diversity could be helpful for particular teachers, but that the district is stressing race and racism so much that teachers are becoming numb towards it.

Diversity training is not a bad thing. I do resent it when someone keeps bringing up past issues instead of moving forward.

I have also been greatly disappointed in the diversity training we have been given. Instead of providing us with a history of racism, as the last presentation was, we should be looking at cultural diversity and how to address learners of all types, not just African American.

Another echoed the interest in focusing on learning styles evident in the last comment above:

More money and support is needed for teachers to connect with students who are hands on learners. Since many of the students who continue to get into repeated trouble seem to be hands on learners.

Other teachers saw a need to connect teaching to understanding of race and racism:

We need to increase the amount of African-American literature taught at our school, especially in the junior year. We do have teachers in our school who need more understanding of racial and cultural issues, but on the most part our staff is very aware and understanding of cultural and racial issues.

I'm not sure what racial awareness training entails for this district, but without individuals touring neighborhoods, speaking with families of low-income, trying harder to put themselves in the shoes of others, racism won't change. The same goes for implementing more study of African American history in schools. You could make this the norm if you want, but there is a conscious way to discuss Black history and a racist way to discuss Black history. If the teacher is racist, what they choose to highlight will be racist as well, portraying African Americans as weak, illiterate, needy, sexual, aggressive or whatever.

Some teachers expressed an interest in training that would help staff identify their own racial biases. One comment along these lines:

... some people may not know that they have any racial biases ... Since I have been at Central there have not been any cultural awareness staff meetings ... One must be aware that they have a bias ... Most people think or say they have no biases.

I do not believe that people are as uncomfortable to talk about race as they are to simply deal with cultural differences. For example, there are some staff members in my building who are very weak as professionals, and become easily intimidated by assertive African-

Americans. Their interpretation is that strong Black people are being aggressive as opposed to assertive and effective. I am tired of weak people seeing people who get the job done as "attacking" them.

Others agreed with the need to sensitize staff to their own potential biases, but couched this in a broader context of understanding law and district policy / practices:

I believe that before you can begin to address diversity issues, make sure you know what diversity means and all are on board about [what] diversity laws and the school districts' policies require. Once you understand these, think about how we want our district to work within the framework they establish. When there are diversity issues ... you need to deal with more than a specific occurrence. One solution is to arrange for an experienced facilitator to conduct workshops to help employees understand the law, district policy, and perhaps their own prejudices.

We have to be educated on the difference between a race issue and a disciplinary issue. So...we need continual realistic racial/cultural comprehension training, not just a book on African American differences or a class to flesh out our hidden racism. We need also training on how to discipline students of all backgrounds without jeopardizing their education unnecessarily because we don't know how to 'fix' him or her. The answer cannot always be suspend/expel. We also need to pay A HUGE amount of attention to the way special education assignments are made across races. Why is it that special education is permanent it seems once a child is coded? Shouldn't the child develop skills along the way to eventually leave these programs? Why are some children getting worse?

In their focus group, principals anticipated this diversity of opinion about what type of training would be useful. Principals suggested that it would be good to know more specifically what kind of training staff think would be useful, recognizing that teachers already feel their teaching suffers because they are taken out of the classroom too much. Given the resistance some staff expressed to framing disparities in racial terms, and the lack of perceived need to address racial issues, it is clear a “one size fits all” approach to identifying and implementing training for district staff will not have maximum impact. Rather, diversity training will need to be targeted carefully and tailored to specific types of audiences.

The scholarly literature that critically examines cultural competency training and diversity training, especially in school settings, supports this view. First, just as there are no universal strategies for teaching children who are culturally and linguistically different from one another, from their teachers, or from students whose interests are already well served by the system, there are no universal strategies for preparing teachers to teach them. But there is growing consensus in the literature that successful preparation of teachers to deal with cultural diversity involves developing *critical cultural awareness*, where administrators and teachers interrogate their own cultural beliefs. Similarly, there is a need for open discussions about the intersections of race/racism and education. Trainings cannot simply provide lists of do's and don'ts – independent thinking in teachers should be encouraged rather than standardized responses.

Recommendations:

1. Provide high quality professional development for both academic and nonacademic staff focused on teaching and supporting students of diverse backgrounds well. This training should be:
 - voluntary, targeted to interested participants
 - targeted to specific interests and experience levels of staff
 - organized in a graduated series
 - participants select their own level
 - participants progress through multiple modules over time
 - options with different content foci (e.g., cultural differences as relates to discipline and student behavior, racial identity, cultural sensitivity, privilege and power, whiteness, etc.)
 - designed to engage participants to develop critical perspective
 - designed to build a critical cohort of staff within each building
 - designed for participants to earn board credit tied to salary increases
 - have some modules that permit experiential learning in community settings
 - have some modules that provide coaching / mentoring of teachers as they carry training into their classroom practice
2. Create safe and competent spaces for staff to engage in ongoing discussions of diversity issues (particularly, but not limited to race and racism)
 - one model is learning communities
 - could be organized to make opportunities available for teachers and staff at the individual school building level
3. Create safe and competent settings for students to express what they are experiencing in schools; these settings should:
 - provide opportunities for students to develop and express voice and resistance
 - acknowledge and honor students' experiences, feelings and history
 - support students to take leadership roles
 - could be located in after school programs and/or student organizations
4. Collaborate with other organizations (e.g., City of Champaign, community based organizations) to provide opportunities for parent training on race and racial issues in education
5. Address the culture of distrust (between school building administrators and central administration; between administrators and teachers; between students and teachers).
6. Develop and provide elective courses at the high school level that identify and develop

venues/opportunities for students to critically engage issues of social history and race. These courses should be for credit course.

7. Engage University of Illinois resources to help address any of these recommendations.
8. Create accountability mechanisms specifying timelines and responsible personnel to mark progress toward the implementation of these recommendations.