



**CHARTER SCHOOL OF  
NEW CASTLE (CSNC):**

# Model for Creating an Inclusive School Climate

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# Charter School of New Castle (CSNC): Model for Creating an Inclusive School Climate



In the spring 2023 issue of the ACLU's national magazine, contributing writer Charley Locke documents the continuing, discipline disparity that attaches to schooling opportunities of black and brown children, and specifically to black and brown students with disabilities. Black students with disabilities were[are] suspended or expelled at twice the rates of white and Latinx students with disabilities. National data, supported by case reports that highlight district and administrator insistence on lowering academic achievement expectations for these students, continues to offer a dismal view of progress in achieving education equity in this country.

As documented in Locke's article, *Separate And Unequal*, for too many students, positive change in their education lives most often requires that parents leave a school, district, and even a state, to find responsive educational opportunities for their special needs children and in many cases for black and brown children, in general. The ACLU's work in Delaware and states around the country has forced litigation and state court decisions that direct state education agencies to remedy the situation. The jury, however, is still out on whether effective change has followed successful lawsuits. The dismal reality is that within public schools in each state's system, there can be significant differences in school culture, leadership perspectives, and teachers' expectations.

ACLU Delaware has made significant investments in Education Equity and Safe Schools in the State. We have taken a more granular look at elements of equity. These are defined in research that examines the essential value of school climate and social-emotional factors that influence achievement and reflect, at the school building and classroom levels, a school's commitment to inclusive practices that allow all students opportunities to thrive.

This work has proceeded by responding to a key question that should establish a framework for working within any school community that seeks to craft inclusive school practices.

Many in education pursue equity through single dimensions with the most prevalent being budget and financial resources. While funding is important, spending levels alone do not produce equitable access to high quality educational opportunities.

We must concern ourselves with how the \$\$'s are spent. Research based recommendations achieved by a range of stakeholders working together provide the best guidance in the form of a framework for shared understanding of critical elements addressed in equity aligned school communities.

First and foremost, there must be shared understanding and collaborative planning and action that includes school board members, state and district leaders, civil rights advocates, families, educators, and certainly students themselves.

Our equity and safe schools work aligns with guidance provided by the National Education Trust and Alliance for Resource Equity (2021), given their 10 Dimensions of Education Resource Equity. In selecting a Delaware model for examining inclusive school practices, we distilled the guidance into 6 Key Areas of Focus endorsed by CSNC educators and board members. The 6 areas of focus reflect the school community's established beliefs and aims:

## 6 KEY AREAS OF FOCUS

1

### School Funding

- Adequacy to Provide High Quality Experiences
- Enrichment that Occurs Naturally for High Income Families
- Experiences that Help Families Plan for the Future

2

### Strong, Competent School Leaders and Teachers

- Focused on Whole Student Development
- Aware and Proactive regarding the Legacy of Discrimination and Racism
- See Themselves in Their Students/Families
- Diverse Backgrounds—Want the Same Outcomes for Students as They Want for Their Own Children and Family Members

3

### Rigorous Curriculum (Planning in Progress)

- Focus on Accelerating Learning as Opposed to Remediation and Catch-up
- Acceleration means harder work, more time committed to learning tasks
- Wrap-around Support Services—help seeking behavior is normalized
- Group Norm establishes peer tutoring and teaching opportunities

4

### Positive Climate

- Restorative Discipline
- Inclusive Culture Diverse Students in Accelerated Learning Opportunities
- Peer/ Near Peer Problem Solving and Behavior Mentoring

5

### High Quality Early Learning (Planning in Progress)

6

### Good Learning Environment

- Positive, Clean, Well-Lit, Repaired Buildings
- Technology and Supplies, Books Etc. in Ready Supply
- Diverse Role Models Functioning School-wide





BENCHMARKS AND RELATED EQUITY OBJECTIVES:

## Charter School of New Castle Model

The work supported by ACLU Delaware has proceeded along three tracks, as it reflects strategic involvement with educators, students, and parents.

1

Inclusive School  
Culture

2

Student  
Engagement

3

Parent  
Engagement

# Focus on Inclusive School Culture

## Educators Embrace Elements of Safe and Healthy Schools that Support Achievement Motivation

CSNC excels in many of the six key areas of focus, with notable commitment to establishing an inclusive school culture that reflects the essential value of keeping all students in classes and in school. The school has exceptionally strong, competent leadership. School leaders, teachers, and support staff function as a team. They see themselves in a community relationship with their students and families.

With ACLU support, the school staff welcomed Akoben LLC, a well-regarded professional development resource with specific research-based experience in facilitating training that encourages

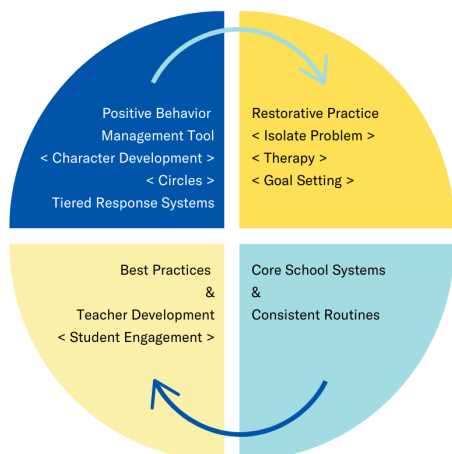
relationship-building as foundational to effective and fair discipline and learning environments.

Akoben provided 12 hours of training on Developing Restorative School Culture. The sessions were attended by an average of 97% of the school's instructional and administrative staff. Response to the training was very positive with 98%-99% of participants indicating that the training supported them in examining their thinking and practices. Additionally, 95%-96% of participants expressed confidence that the training provided them a deeper understanding of the restorative mindset and associated practices.

The ACLU supported training served to augment extensive development of restorative processes already in use by the school. Data cited below indicate the use of focused efforts to create a

fluid process that employs appropriate strategies to target development of growth mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors within the school community.

### School Culture: Charter School of New Castle - ES



See also the Jag System (appended file). This is a school-wide intervention system that allows students to elect corrective behaviors, given the opportunity to participate in regularly scheduled events.

The Charter School of New Castle (CSNC) provides an encouraging model for school communities that seek compliance with state legislation that requires schools that suspend students at a high rate or that show significant disparities in the rates of suspension among demographic subgroups to take meaningful corrective actions that include transparent reporting, parent and community-informed planning, and adoption of restorative, non-punitive discipline practices.

# CHART SUSPENSION DATA 2017-2022

In consecutive reporting cycles, while out of school suspension rates mirror state averages, CSNC In-school Suspension rates are reported as lower than state averages, with every effort being made by administrators, teachers, and staff to keep students in classrooms. In 2022, the In-school Suspension rate in the state averaged 5% and the reported rate for CSNC is <2%.

*Note: In-School Suspension removes students from regular classroom participation and assigns them to a room or area of the school with no access to the students' regular instructional program. Out-of-School Suspension removes students from the school building and property for assigned periods.*

## BEHAVIOR AND SUSPENSIONS (% OF ENROLLMENT)

DATA SOURCE: DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SCHOOL REPORT CARDS: ACCESS ON-LINE REPORTCARD.DOE.K12.DE.US

Year 2017	% Suspended In-School	% Suspended Out-of-School	Other % Violent Incidents
State	7%	8.5%	5%
CSNC	3%	12%	<5%

Year 2018	% Suspended In-School	% Suspended Out-of-School	Other % Violent Incidents
State	6.8%	7.7%	4.8%
CSNC	2%	10.5%	6%

Year 2019	% Suspended In-School	% Suspended Out-of-School	Other % Violent Incidents
State	6.5%	7.7%	4.8%
CSNC	1%	9.5%	3%

Year 2020	% Suspended In-School	% Suspended Out-of-School	Other % Violent Incidents
State	4.9%	5.9%	3.9%
CSNC	<1%	6.3%	2.8%

Year 2022	% Suspended In-School	% Suspended Out-of-School	Other % Violent Incidents
State	5%	7.3%	4.8%
CSNC	<2%	8.5%	No Report

When compared to district schools and other charters with similar student populations\* (size and demographics), Charter School of New Castle’s in school suspension rate is dramatically lower at <2% than traditional district/charter k-7/k-8 schools, with In-school Suspension Rates above 10% in the noted

period. (See Behavior reports by school 2021-2022). When compared to traditional district k-7 schools and k-8 charter schools with similar enrollments, the Out of School Suspension rate of CSNC is notably lower at 8.5% than the 12.5% - 19% rates reported by schools with similar size and demographic enrollments.

Year 2022	% Suspended In-School	% Suspended Out-of-School
State	5%	7.3%
CSNC	<2%	8.5%
K-7 *Traditional District	11%	19%
K-8 *Charter	No Report	12.5%

**The CSNC model is instructive. School communities can reduce the frequency of in school and out-of-school suspensions by adopting responsive school interactions that convey expectations that students belong in school and in their classes.**



# Student Engagement

Students are Active in Problem-solving and Positive Peer Relationships that Foster Achievement



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Increase participation of students in academic leadership roles that reward and encourage competitive academic performance
- Increase participation of students in peer mentoring roles that encourage problem-solving and create opportunities for students to take more responsibility for their behavior
- Increase opportunities for students to determine and engage in enrichment activities designed to strengthen academic skills and self-regulation

ACLU Delaware supported adoption and introduction of the Engaged for Action curriculum, which was employed during academic year afterschool activities in 2021

and 2022. Given health emergency realities that followed the 2020 school year suspension of in-person learning, the after-school program enrollment did not reach planned levels:

Elementary/ Middle	2021 Planned Enrollment	2021 Actual Enrollment	2022 Planned Enrollment	2022 Actual Enrollment
Elementary	15-20	12	15-20	19
Middle	15-20	9	15-20	8

Groups (after-school clubs) were led by two faculty members at each level, with activities guided by the Engaged for Action curriculum. See appended copy. The CSNC clubs selected the name Scholars Engaged for Action, and

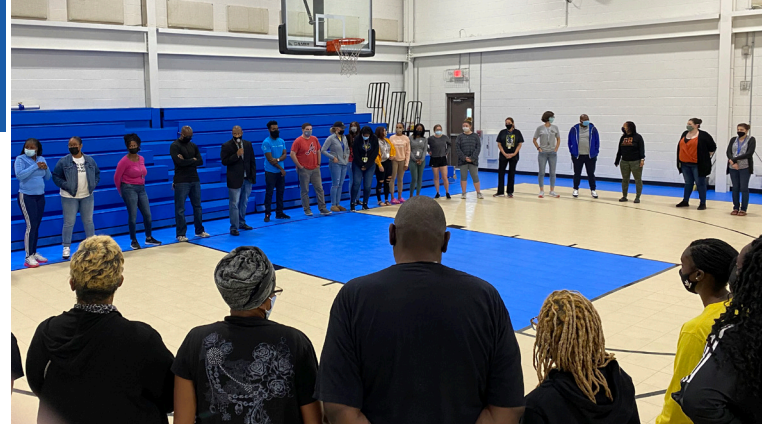
each club completed two nine-week sessions that each culminated with completion of student planned and led projects. Each 9-week cycle concluded with the students' public presentations of their projects.





## ACHIEVING QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK

Qualitative indicators typically monitor attitudes and perceptions that influence student achievement and are self-reported. In projects that provide defined activity cycles, such as the nine-week curriculum cycle of the project, student attitudes and perceptions of both their own potential for success and their valuing of project services might be surveyed at the very beginning of the cycle and again at its conclusion. In the two-year implementation of the CSNC Engaged for Action effort, however, data was collected only at the conclusion of each nine-week curriculum cycle. The curriculum approach anticipates the continuous participation of the same students for the two 9-week sessions. The CSNC implementation, however, enrolled different students during each of the 9-week sessions.



## ACHIEVING PILOT PHASE DATA

All student participants respond to the survey. Additionally, to examine whether program participants report perceptions that differ from their peers who are not participating in the program, a control group of non-participating similar students who reside in the same zip codes as the participating students should also respond to selected parts of the survey using the designated non-participant form. No control group data was achieved for the CSNC pilot.

# Qualitative Feedback

## SENSE OF BELONGING AMONG YOUNG ADOLESCENTS AND ACADEMIC SELF EFFICACY

Two theoretical frameworks inform the development of the survey, which is designed to identify changes in perceptions and attitudes. Survey questions solicit reporting on Learning Goals Orientation and Academic Self-Efficacy, as these concepts have been defined in scholarly work noted in the attached list of selected references.

The relationships among early adolescents' sense of school belonging, perceptions of their academic values, and academic motivation have been linked by scholars to the achievement potential of students. Theorists suggest that students' motives to achieve in school are the joint function of their expectation for success, given experiences fostered by a school's culture and the students'

own valuing of academic success. The school's culture communicates expectations of success and the valuing of the students as members of a success-focused community. Taken together these are essential elements that support achievement motivation and the development of efficacy behaviors.

In related research, achievement motivation is also defined as a function of the interaction between efficacy behaviors and learning goal orientation. This research posits that higher goal orientation in tandem with efficacy behaviors produces higher academic performance. The National Research Council's report on How People Learn, Brain, Mind, Experience, and School (2000) outlines goals for the most constructive learning conditions.



They include creating learner centered communities that enact explicit learning goal orientations. Characteristics of such communities include the following:

- Learners take risks
- Teachers emphasize achieving mastery skills vs. finishing tasks
- Teachers provide opportunities for students to explain and demonstrate understanding
- Learning outcomes are authentic demonstrations of knowledge

## Relevant Characteristics of the Engaged for Action Curriculum

The Engaged for Action curriculum is designed to foster a dynamic and responsive program culture. The activities foster community, and they set-in-motion work that concludes with authentic achievement demonstrations. The curriculum supports focus on a community issue or problem and engages students in the development and execution of an action or project to address the issue. The activities are designed to strengthen core academic skills, while nurturing confidence and agency.

Throughout the nine-week experience, the students work in teams on activities that strengthen reading, writing, research, data collection, data analysis, critical thinking, decision-making, public speaking, action, and passion. Each session includes specific opportunities for conversation that fosters problem-solving within community. The concluding activity is a celebration during which the students present the action taken to address the community issue.

## Qualitative Feedback

The Engaged for Action Student Survey was developed with items that reflect U.S. Department of Education published school climate survey instruments with items reported by schools, districts, states, and higher education researchers. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments maintains a comprehensive annotated listing of surveys used across school districts nation-wide. See School Climate Survey Compendium [www.safesupportivelearning.ed.gov](http://www.safesupportivelearning.ed.gov).

Limitations to full program implementation following the health concerns interruptions to in-school participation inhibited research. The following chart summarizes expected outcomes and students' survey responses, given limited data collection opportunities. Students' responses to survey items are examined in noted categories (A)-(D) and presented in rating scale order from (1=low) not true (for me) to (5=very high) very true (for me).

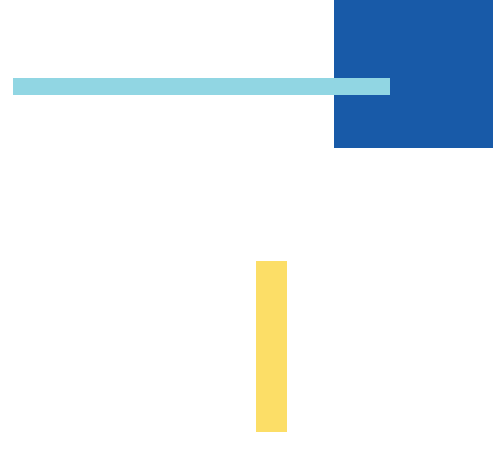
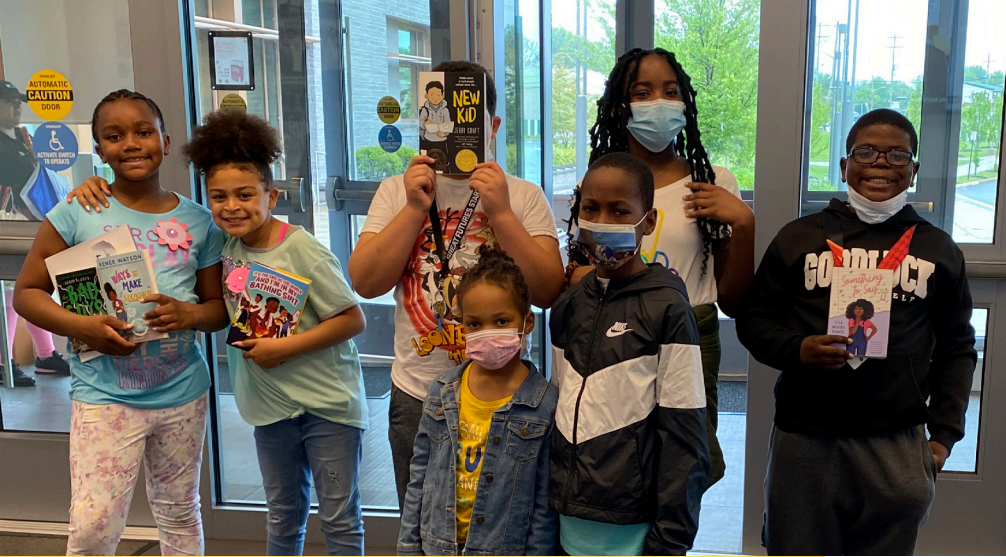
**Sample Questions:**

- (A) I belong in this school
- (B) I can learn from other students
- (C) I can do hard assignments if I really try
- (D) I can get help from my teacher if I need it

Survey Results: (A) School Belonging, (B) Peer Group Problem-solving, (C) Personal Academic Ability, (D) Teachers as Resources

Expected Outcomes	Students' Enrolled N=21 2021 (21 Surveys Completed)	Students' Enrolled N=27 2022 (18 Surveys Completed)
<b>(A) Positive perceptions of belonging in the school community</b>	<b>21/21</b> Students Rated their Sense of Belonging at Level 4 (High) and 5 (Very High)	<b>16/18</b> Students Rated their Sense of Belonging at Level 4 (High) and 5 (Very High)  <b>2/18</b> Students did not rate this item
<b>(B) Positive perceptions of opportunities to learn from other students</b>	<b>16/21</b> Students Rated Opportunities to Learn from Other Students as Valued at Level 4 (High) and 5 (Very High)  <b>5/21</b> Students Rated this item at Level 3 (Average)	<b>15/18</b> Students Rated Opportunities to Learn from Other Students as Valued at Level 4 (High) and 5 (Very High)  <b>3/18</b> Students Rated this item at Level 3 (Average)
<b>(C) Positive perceptions of personal academic ability</b>	<b>18/21</b> Students Rated their Abilities to do Challenging Work at Level 4(High) and 5(Very High)  <b>3/21</b> Students Rated this Item at Level 3 (Average)	<b>13/18</b> Students Rated their Abilities to do Challenging Work at Level 4(High) and 5(Very High)  <b>2/18</b> Students Rated this item as Level 2 (Low)
<b>(D) Positive perceptions of teachers as allies and resources</b>	<b>21/21</b> Students Rated their Access to Help from Teachers when Needed at Level 5 (Very High)	<b>15/18</b> Students Rated their access to Help from Teachers when Needed at Level 4 (High) and 5 (Very High).  <b>3/18</b> Students Rated their Access to Help from Teachers when Needed at Level 1 (Very Low) and Level 2 (Low)





## DISCUSSION

With such limited data collected and a very small sample group, this data lacks generalizability. Given feedback during focus group sessions captured in video documents, as well as quantitative indicators of the impact of restorative interactions in lowering in-school and out-of-school exclusion rates, this data appears to confirm this school's inclusive culture. Survey responses to item A when averaged for both years indicate a 94.5% Sense of Belonging rating of High and Very High.

Educators at this school perform as resources to their students. Survey responses to item D when averaged for both years indicate at 91.5% Positive Perception of teachers as Allies and Resources. This assessment is also confirmed in captured video documents, as well as the positive responses of teachers and administrators to the restorative discipline training.



## VALUED VIDEO DOCUMENTATION

Teachers' and students' taped responses to the program fully capture the "lived" impact of the CSNC Scholars Engaged for Action experience. In summary, both elementary and middle school clubs established service projects that were planned and executed by the students. The students' activities have been recognized by the CSNC community as useful and supportive of the school's aims to encourage self regulation and achievement motivation.



TRACK III

# Parent Engagement

## Parent Allies are Effective Advocates for Safe and Healthy Schools that Support Achievement Motivation

The ACLU's Senior Policy leader is a well-regarded parent engagement specialist in the state. She succeeded in developing a core group of 26 parents, with several parents rising to leadership roles. The leadership group established a CSNC Parent Advisory Committee and selected officers. The leadership group gained significant opportunities to identify school community resources during interactions with school leaders.



### PARENT SESSIONS

Parent Sessions met monthly October 2021-June 2023 with specific topics addressed during each session. Topics included the following:

- 10 Essential Questions to ask during parent-teacher conferences
- How to advocate effectively for your children (3-part series)
- How to support your student at home
- Mastering the middle—helping your middle schooler get organized, manage time and improve study habits
- What's in an IEP & 504 plan. Know your rights
- How to support your student at home
- Building an effective team
- Restorative Practices—Supporting development of a restorative school culture
- Understanding your leadership style
- Planning parent-led events: Legislative Brunch, Family Fun Reading Day and Tabling during school events
- Connecting to school-based and community resources



Video documentation indicates that parent participants benefitted from the organized sessions:

- ✓ Participants indicated increased ability to advocate for their student
- ✓ Participants stated that they have more confidence in communicating with administrators
- ✓ Participants identified the benefits of connecting with other parents
- ✓ Participants increased their understanding of the IEP & 504 processes
- ✓ Participants identified strategies that support student learning at home.

# Ending Notes and Summative Review:

## Baseline Data Charter School of New Castle (CSNC)

Zip Codes Served, Enrollment, and Student Demographics have remained stable.

Approximately 59% of enrollment resides in zip codes 19720, 19701 and 19702 with the average poverty rate at 9.3% (less than the state rate of 12%). Approximately 26% of enrollment resides in zip codes 19801, 19802, 19805 with the average poverty rate at 27.3% (among highest poverty rates in the state).

### DE Department of Education Data

#### CSNC Enrollment:

2019	2020	2021	2022
766	762	761	752

#### Student Demographics:

86.88%	African American
6.56 %	Hispanic
2.36%	Multi-racial
3.15%	Caucasian
3.02%	ELL
39.37%	Low Income
10.1%	Students with Disabilities

See Also Academic Performance Data 2017-2022 in Appendix. No discussion of this data is undertaken in this report, given the limited time commitment of the partnership.

### Delaware Reality

See School Discipline Improvement Program Report 2019-2020 School Year: Data Reflecting the Use of Exclusionary Discipline Practices, Access On-line at [education.delaware.gov](http://education.delaware.gov)

Focus on K-7/8 Schools in New Castle County Snapshots of Schools that Exceeded the 15% Suspension Threshold in the 2019-2020 School Year with Specific Data on the Subgroups with Suspension Rates that Exceed the Threshold Pursuant to Delaware Code Title 14 \* 703

School K-7/8 Schools	Disciplinary Action	Subgroups Suspended at or Above Threshold	# of Subgroups Affected
The Bancroft School	In School Suspensions	All Students, Male, African American, Latino, White, Multi Racial, Students with Disabilities, Low Income	8
	Out-of-School Suspensions	All Students, Male, African American, Latino, Students with Disabilities, Low Income	6
The Bayard School	In School Suspensions	All Students, Male, Female, African American, Multi-Racial, Students with Disabilities, Low Income	7
	Out-of-School Suspensions	All Students, Male, Female, African American, Multi-Racial, Students with Disabilities, Low Income	7
East Side Charter	Out-of-School Suspensions	All Students, Male, African American, Latino, Students with Disabilities, Low Income	6

*Note: In 2020-2021 No K-7/8 schools in New Castle County met or exceeded the 15% threshold for in-school/ out-of-school suspensions.*

# FINAL NOTES

## **The Extent to Which the Charter School of New Castle**

**Demonstrates Resource Equity:** The school is clearly a model for positive climate and exceptional leadership. Restrictions in the access of charter schools to state funding inhibits development in expansion of the school to provide more rigorous curriculum and early learning. Administrators have outlined plans for overcoming the funding limitations.

## **The extent to which the ACLU's Work Influenced Adoption of**

**Equity Practices:** The ACLU's Education and Equity interventions have provided strategic support in developing community resources, parent support, and political engagement that are factors in securing resources that can support curriculum and service expansion.

**Introduction of the Scholars Engaged for Action program provided staff opportunities to "open" the curriculum to student-led learning frameworks that, in fact, support accelerated learning experiences. The ACLU facilitated training for educators on Restorative Practices served as a mastery immersion for school leaders and instructional staff whose commitment to creating inclusive school culture is exemplary.**

