

# 2023 STATE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, & BELONGING

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Susan Groundwater, Fan Jiang,  
Brittney Becker, Joy Gitter,  
and Kenya Shujaa



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# INTRODUCTION

Belonging is a fundamental human need that shapes our actions, relationships, and overall well-being. In the context of education, fostering a sense of belonging among students, teachers, and parents is not only a desirable goal, but a critical factor in supporting equity, positive student outcomes, community engagement, and a healthy school climate. Belonging is also at the core of a systematic approach to conducting an equity audit, something that has become a central focus of school districts across the country in recent years.

Within the broader context of an equity audit, Hanover Research developed the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Diagnostic survey. This tool aids district leaders in assessing stakeholder perceptions of various issues, such as school belonging, social environment, academic environment, staff perceptions, engagement and outreach, and district priorities. For districts where the DEIB survey may not be suitable or feasible, Hanover Research also developed a K-12 Climate Survey that touches on many of the same topic areas. The data compiled and presented in this report encapsulate the perspectives gleaned from over 250,000 DEIB Diagnostic and K-12 Climate Survey responses from students, parents, and staff at member districts.

Hanover Research has also created a Student Outcomes Data Analysis, a data visualization tool designed to assist districts in pinpointing and interpreting proportionalities and disproportionalities across various student data points. Over the past few years, Hanover has gathered and analyzed data spanning (2016-17 to 2021-22) from fifty-three member districts nationwide, encompassing more than one million students. This dataset reflects students attending schools in districts with diverse sizes, regions, urbanicity levels, and demographic compositions. For each district-level analysis, Hanover developed an interactive dashboard that enables district users to filter by specific subsets across predetermined segments of interest.

This report leverages data from analyses conducted for district members across all regions of the country, compiling aggregated datasets from the DEIB Diagnostic Survey, the K-12 Climate Survey, and the Student Outcomes Data Analysis. Understanding the inherent connection between educational diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is essential to mitigating challenges highlighted in the data, which are related to the emerging themes of culturally responsive-sustaining teaching, strong teacher-student relationships, meaningful family engagement, and restorative practices. To achieve significant, systemic change, these priorities must be addressed simultaneously rather than discretely. The findings and insights in this report can be utilized by district leaders to assist in preparing for an equity audit, guiding strategic planning, choosing key performance indicators, and conducting ongoing improvement initiatives.

# HANOVER’S APPROACH TO A DEIB AUDIT

Hanover recommends a multi-year, mixed-methodology approach to support districts undertaking a DEIB audit. A commitment to DEIB requires district-wide reform efforts, and therefore must be completed deliberately and at a pace that will adequately build consensus. It is important to note that district leaders must determine the availability of data, their internal timelines for reform efforts, and the extent to which their community is bought-into systemic reform in order to develop a customized approach that will best support both the district’s current state and goals for the future.

It is critical to leverage both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in a DEIB audit to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the equity journey. Quantifiable data provides objective, important insights into measurable data such as academic performance, attendance rates, or graduation percentages, but it does not document the full complexity of human experiences and behaviors. Therefore, it is also necessary to capture individual experiences and empower student, parent, and staff voices through qualitative and experiential methodologies that may include surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups. This integrated approach increases the reliability and validity of the research and can lead to more nuanced insights and a holistic understanding of the process.

The table below summarizes three components of Hanover’s broader approach to a DEIB audit. Additional data collection and research may be needed to ensure that all voices and perspectives are incorporated. This may include gathering qualitative data through focus groups or in-depth interview studies; conducting additional surveys to gather more targeted feedback on specific programs or policies; completing additional data analyses, such as a course sequencing study to identify patterns or disparities in course enrollment or analysis of staff retention and attrition; and secondary research to learn more about specific DEIB policies or practices.

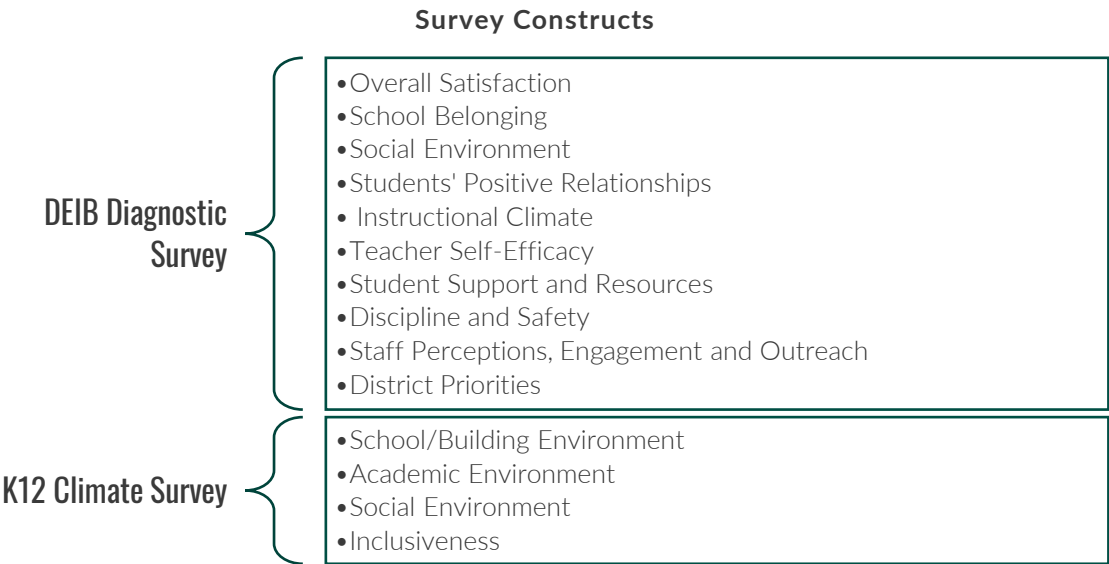
Research Project	Key Research Questions
DEIB Diagnostic Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>What are educational partners’ perceptions of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging within the district?</li><li>What are differences in perceptions within the district across and within groups (e.g., between students and staff, among students from different racial/ethnic groups, etc.)?</li><li>What are educational partners’ priorities for diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging?</li></ul>
K12 Climate Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>What are educational partners’ perceptions of the current school climate in the district?</li><li>How do educational partners’ perceptions of the school climate differ across groups?</li><li>Among the four key constructs (listed in following section), for which constructs is the district performing well? Conversely, what are areas for improvement?</li></ul>
Student Outcomes Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Where do disparities in student academic outcomes, behavioral outcomes, and program enrollment outcomes exist in the district?</li><li>Where do disparities in student participation in state assessments and enrollment in programs exist in the district?</li><li>Have these disparities diminished over time? At which schools, in which grades, and among which student subgroups is there less disparity in recent years? Where is there more disparity?</li></ul>

Hanover has executed the DEIB audit projects listed in the above table for member districts across the United States and aggregates the results at a national level for this report. The following section outlines our methodology for this national analysis.

DEIB DIAGNOSTIC AND K12-CLIMATE SURVEYS

Instrument Design

Hanover developed the DEIB Diagnostic Survey and K-12 Climate Survey to assess district community members’ (i.e., students, parents, and staff) perceptions of DEIB and climate and culture in their school and district. Hanover’s content experts and survey methodologists examined relevant literature; resources developed by organizations that support K12 education; and trends in DEIB and climate instruments designed by Hanover for our K-12 education clients. Based on this comprehensive review, we identified the following core sections to measure for each survey.



Analysis

For this report, Hanover’s analysis of the DEIB Diagnostic Survey and K-12 Climate Survey data involved three main processes: data cleaning, topline analysis, and segmentation analysis.

**Data cleaning** is a rigorous process designed to eliminate low quality data. It involves a thorough review of responses for thoughtfulness, logical consistency, and attention to detail. Responses that trigger “flags” on several measures are removed from the dataset. The data included in this report were cleaned at the district level, and the clean data were compiled into the final national-level datasets.

**Topline analysis** explores patterns across all responses in all districts and is particularly useful for identifying topics or issues upon which there is broad consensus.

**Segmentation analysis** explores differences by respondent characteristic. This paper focuses on segmentation by district role (staff, parent, or student).

An interactive dashboard of survey results allows for additional segmentation analysis, including results by district characteristics identified through data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

This report summarizes key findings and trends identified in the results of the DEIB Diagnostic and K-12 Climate Survey national dataset developed by Hanover Research. These results are not nationally representative: the analysis does not add weighting to the data when presenting the results. However, the data include survey results from districts across all regions in the United States and with a range of enrollment sizes and urbanicity levels.

## STUDENT OUTCOMES DATA ANALYSIS

### Student and District Data

Hanover collected student-level data from 44 member districts across the country for the five-year period from 2016-17 (2017) to 2021-22 (2022) to create individual Student Outcomes Data Analyses. These data were then aggregated to create the national dataset analyzed in this report. Participating districts vary in size, region, urbanicity level, and the demographic makeup of their students. However, this analysis does not include weighting for representation, and the national dataset may not form a representative sample of students across the country. The combined national dataset has more limited representation among smaller districts, districts in towns and rural areas, and districts in the Northeast. Overall, these data describe almost one million students in each year of data collected between 2017 and 2021 (highest in 2019, n=1,116,427) and 412,520 students in 2022. Nineteen of the 53 districts provided data for the most recent year at the time of this analysis, compared to 42-53 districts from 2017 to 2021. Hanover continues to expand this dataset over time.

The dataset also includes district and student characteristics to allow for a comparative analysis by student group and district type. **District characteristics** are enrollment, region (Northeast, South, Midwest, or West), urbanicity level (city, suburb, town, or rural), the percentage of diverse students, and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students (i.e., students received free or reduced-price meals). **Student characteristics** describe gender, race/ethnicity, economic disadvantage (FRL) status, English Learner (EL) status, participation in Special Education (SPED), and Section 504 plan status.

### Measured Student Outcomes

Hanover's Student Outcomes Data Analysis tracks student outcomes within two broad categories: success outcomes and risk outcomes. Hanover groups desirable or positively framed outcomes (e.g., proficiency on state standardized assessments) as "success" outcomes and undesirable or negatively framed outcomes as "risk" outcomes. This report focuses on measures of student belonging among the risk outcomes, specifically chronic absenteeism, involvement in disciplinary incidents, and suspensions. The national dataset compiles common and comparable outcomes from individual districts.

### Data Suppression

The total number of students represented in data from Hanover members approaches one million per year. However, some data and results are suppressed to avoid identifying districts and/or students. To this end, Hanover does not include results for a group of fewer than five districts or fewer than 30 students. This restriction has suppressed any findings for the Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander student group for all observed outcomes and for the American Indian or Alaska Native student group for a subset of outcomes.

## FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD

### STUDENT BELONGING

Students, parents, and staff generally agree that adults at school care about and support students. Most also agree that adults understand students' backgrounds, but slightly fewer students agree that adults at their school understand them and their experiences. Students also indicate a lower sense of belonging than parents or staff believe they feel, and this difference is notably larger for responses to the K-12 Climate Survey data versus the DEIB Diagnostic.

- Most students agree that their teachers help them feel confident that they can do well in school (73%), and most students, parents, and staff agree that adults at school care about and support students beyond schoolwork (71%, 74%, and 87%, respectively).
- Additionally, around two-thirds of parents and staff agree that adults at school understand students' experiences and backgrounds (66% and 67%), and slightly more (69%) students say adults at their school understand their culture and background. However, only 57% of students agree that adults at their school understand them and their experiences.
- Among respondents who completed the DEIB Diagnostic, students were less likely than parents or staff to agree that students are proud of their school (67%, 76%, and 73%, respectively), feel like they are a part of their school community (68%, 73%, and 75%, respectively), and feel welcome at school (77%, 83%, and 86%, respectively). The results are similar for respondents to the Climate Survey; however, students are notably even less likely to agree that they are proud to attend their school (50% vs. 75% and 73%), feel like they belong at school (54% vs. 76% and 81%), and feel welcome at school (62% vs. 81% and 87%).

### PARENT BELONGING

**Responses suggest that schools are welcoming to parents, but they may be less successful in meaningful engagement.**

- Most parents and staff agree that their school makes families feel welcome (74% and 86%), and 76% of parents agree that staff members at their child's school make parents feel welcome.
- Compared to staff, parents are less likely to agree that their child's school makes families feel valued (67% vs. 81%). Some potential factors may be that parents less frequently agree that their child's school provides families with opportunities to be involved at the school (69% vs. 78%), welcomes families into the decision-making process (62% vs. 76%), and works with parents to reduce barriers to parents' participation in school activities (59% vs. 76%).
- Parent responses suggest that district engagement is lower than school engagement, with only 60% agreeing that the district engages parents compared to 65% of parents agreeing that schools engage parents. Similarly, parents are less likely to agree that the district responds to parent questions and concerns (61%) than staff members at their child's school (77%).
- Student responses show a similar trend, with 79% of students agreeing that their families feel welcome at school events but only 59% saying their family attends school events and only 58% agreeing that adults at their school care about their families.

### STAFF BELONGING

**Staff report high levels of support from their peers.** Over 90% of staff respondents say they have positive relationships with students (98%) and other staff members (94%) at their school. Also, 88% of staff agree that their colleagues care about them, and 83% agree that their supervisor/manager cares about them.

### CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

The chronic absenteeism rate is a common measure of student attendance that reflects their sense of belonging at school. In 2022, chronic absenteeism rates continued to rise across student groups and regions, generally doubling pre-COVID-19 pandemic rates. Across all students in Hanover's national dataset, about 17 percent were chronically absent in 2019. In 2021, the year of hybrid learning and returning to school, about one-quarter of students were chronically absent. This rate rose to almost 38 percent in 2022.

- The increase in 2022 is stark across student groups. Among White students, where the rate in 2021 (16%) was slightly higher than in 2019 (14%), almost one-in-three students (33%) were chronically absent. Among Black students, chronic absenteeism rose from 21 percent in 2019 to 35 percent in 2021 and 41 percent in 2022.
- The pre-pandemic to post-pandemic rise in chronic absenteeism is also present across other groups. It rose for both economically disadvantaged students (20% to 38%) and non-economically disadvantaged students (11% to 24%). It also rose regardless of student gender, English Learner status, Special Education status, and Section 504 status.
- The chronic absenteeism rate also about doubled in both districts located in cities and those located in suburbs in 2022 when compared to pre-pandemic rates, though the rate is much higher in city districts (47%) than in suburban districts (28%).

### BEHAVIOR AND DISCIPLINE

Students were generally less likely to be involved in disciplinary incidents or to be suspended in 2022 than in 2019, the last full school year with reliable student behavior data. Incident rates fell from 19 percent in 2019 to 15 percent in 2022, while suspension rates fell from 12 percent to 11 percent over the same period. However, these changes are not uniform across student groups and regions.

- Among White students, the average incident rate was similar in 2022 as it was in 2019 (15%), while suspensions fell slightly (8% to 7%). Among Black students, rates fell for both incidents (25% to 19%) and suspensions (28% to 19%) over the same period. There was a larger decline in incident rates (17% to 9%) and a smaller decline in suspension rates (10% to 9%) among Hispanic/Latino students.
- The decline in incident rates was also greater among economically disadvantaged students (21% to 12%) than among non-economically disadvantaged students (12% to 9%), although declines in suspension rates were similar across economic statuses.
- Again, the data show different trends among urban and suburban districts. Students who attended urban districts experienced a slight decline in incident rates from 2019 (24%) to 2022 (22%). Meanwhile, students who attended suburban districts experienced a larger decline (13% to 8%). Suspension rates remained about the same in urban districts (11%) but declined in suburban districts (15% to 9%).

The decline in disciplinary outcomes seems to counter the large increase in chronic absenteeism, but these two trends may be aligned. First, it is possible that those students who are chronically absent would have exhibited unacceptable behaviors had they attended school more frequently, thus being referred for incidents or suspended. Second, some of the decline in discipline outcomes could be the result of the adoption of alternative disciplinary policies, including restorative practices, to help students stay engaged as they returned to school after COVID-related school closures.



## WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS

Fostering belonging among students, teachers, and parents is critical to supporting equity, positive student outcomes, community engagement, and school climate.<sup>1</sup> Seminal education researchers Carol Goodenow and Kathleen Grady define school belonging as “the extent to which [children, parents, and teachers] feel individually welcomed, respected, included, and supported by others in the school environment.”<sup>2</sup> When education partners experience a sense of belonging, they feel accepted for who they are and connected to the school community.<sup>3</sup> When students experience a sense of belonging at school, they also demonstrate improved social, emotional, and academic outcomes.<sup>4</sup> Four key areas in which districts, schools, and educators can foster a sense of belonging among students and families include:

- culturally responsive-sustaining teaching,
- strong teacher-student relationships,
- meaningful family engagement, and
- restorative practices.

### CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE-SUSTAINING TEACHING

Culturally responsive-sustaining (CR-S) teaching values students’ diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds as assets for classroom learning and instruction while sustaining students’ bi-/multilingualism and bi-/multiculturalism.<sup>5</sup> Situated within and built upon the seminal research of Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, and Django Paris, CR-S teaching practices bridge cultural gaps and create enhanced understanding for students and teachers alike.<sup>6</sup> CR-S teaching facilitates equity and belonging in the classroom by enabling all students to feel welcome and safe in class through curricular and instructional practices that reflect students’ identities and support classroom communities that celebrate diversity.<sup>7</sup> CR-S teaching also offers teachers tools to form positive, asset-based relationships with students, value students’ cultures as critical to daily learning, and support the development of students’ positive identities.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, a growing empirical research base suggests that CR-S teaching supports students’ positive academic achievement outcomes, academic engagement and persistence, attendance, interest in school, and critical consciousness.<sup>9</sup> Research also suggests that CR-S pedagogies can support equity by facilitating improvements to students’ feelings of belonging and social-emotional learning outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

### STRONG TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Building strong, positive teacher-student relationships is essential to promoting students’ social-emotional development and motivating students to succeed academically.<sup>11</sup> Empirical studies find that strong teacher-student relationships support improved academic outcomes, positive student behavior and social interactions, and increased academic motivation and engagement in school.<sup>12</sup> Teacher-student relationships also contribute to students’ feelings of belonging at school and can serve as a protective factor against peer victimization and psychosocial distress (e.g., depression, anxiety, and stress).<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, conflictual teacher-student relationships are associated with reduced academic achievement, and students who perceive teachers as uncaring or hostile are more likely to disengage from schoolwork and engage in disruptive behaviors, whereas the same students tend to invest increased effort for teachers they perceive as caring and supportive.<sup>14</sup> Positive relationships between students and other school adults (e.g., school nurses, cafeteria workers) can also support students’ motivation and positive outcomes.<sup>15</sup> Research also suggests that students from low-income families form fewer strong relationships with their teachers than their non-economically disadvantaged peers.<sup>16</sup>

Building positive relationships requires teachers to focus on students’ social-emotional needs in addition to academic content, and students must perceive that their teacher cares about them, communicates well with them, and provides them with academic and social-emotional support.<sup>17</sup> Teachers can demonstrate caring in a

variety of ways, including showing positive and flexible attitudes toward teaching and fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect between teachers and students.<sup>18</sup>

### MEANINGFUL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Family engagement comprises meaningful practices that incorporate families in supporting ongoing student learning.<sup>19</sup> Decades of research consistently link family engagement with increased student academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and general academic success.<sup>20</sup> However, teachers and principals often identify family engagement as “one of the most challenging aspects of their work,” partially because they may lack the training and knowledge needed to engage all families.<sup>21</sup>

Schools can facilitate meaningful, equitable family engagement and family members’ feelings of belonging by creating a **welcoming school climate that encourages families to participate in decision-making**.<sup>23</sup> While a negative school climate can hinder family engagement, fostering an environment where families feel valued, respected, and supported increases the likelihood that families will collaborate with the school to bolster their child's education.<sup>24</sup>

The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) defines family engagement as:<sup>22</sup>

[A] shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development.

The most common barriers to meaningful family engagement include logistical barriers (e.g., scheduling and transportation), language and cultural barriers, and impacts of families’ negative past experiences or misconceptions about schools. Schools can foster a more inclusive environment that encourages parental engagement by identifying and targeting potential logistical barriers preventing families from engaging in school, such as families’ time, work schedules, childcare needs, and transportation.<sup>25</sup> To address linguistic and cultural differences in family engagement, educators should work to view such distinctions as an asset, reflect on their beliefs and assumptions about family engagement, and engage in professional development on taking a strengths-based, home-school partnership approach to engaging families.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, as families’ negative past experiences with schools or misconceptions can prevent meaningful school engagement, districts should implement strategies to build trust, establish regular communication, and provide a welcoming environment that contributes to family belonging.<sup>27</sup> Research indicates that racial/ethnic minority and recently immigrated families are more likely to perceive barriers to school-based engagement.<sup>28</sup>

### RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and students’ return to in-person learning, an increasing number of districts are implementing restorative practices to address disciplinary incidents while reducing their use of exclusionary discipline policies (i.e., out-of-school (OSS) suspensions and expulsions).<sup>29</sup> Restorative justice includes a set of practices for creating a relationship-based community and managing student misbehavior by repairing harm rather than punishing.<sup>30</sup> According to data collected and published by the U.S. Department of Education, 60.2 percent of public schools reported student involvement in restorative practices during the 2019-20 school year (68.5 percent among schools with at least 50 percent minority student enrollment), an increase of 26 percent since the 2015-16 school year and 20 percent since the 2017-18 school year.<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, some states have recently attempted to implement or revive harsh disciplinary policies.<sup>32</sup>

While empirical research on the impact of restorative practices on student outcomes is still in the early stages and somewhat mixed, a variety of academic studies finds that the use of restorative practices is associated with reduced rates of suspensions and exclusionary discipline outcomes; improved social, interpersonal, emotional skills; higher academic achievement; and improved attendance.<sup>33</sup> Research also shows that students experiencing higher levels of restorative practices report less bullying and improved school climate, peer relationships, and school connectedness outcomes.<sup>34</sup> However, studies find mixed results on whether restorative practices reduce disparities in discipline outcomes between Black and White students.<sup>35</sup>

Whereas restorative practices can support students’ feelings of belonging, traditional exclusionary discipline is associated with racial disproportionality and a variety of negative student outcomes, such as lower academic

achievement and increased risks of being retained in a grade, dropping out of school, engaging in substance use, and being arrested or incarcerated.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, research finds that Black students experiencing school discipline (or Black students in schools that discipline Black students more harshly) experience a reduced sense of belonging.<sup>37</sup> Schools and districts should reconsider zero-tolerance policies that mandate exclusionary discipline and implement more equitable disciplinary strategies such as restorative practices.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

When a sense of belonging is nurtured and sustained, it can lead to a plethora of positive outcomes, including improved social, emotional, and academic performance among students. To cultivate this sense of belonging, it is vital for districts, schools, and educators to focus on four key areas: culturally responsive-sustaining teaching, strong teacher-student relationships, meaningful family engagement, and restorative practices. Each of these areas plays a unique and significant role in creating an inclusive and supportive school environment where everyone feels valued and connected.

The research discussed herein emphasizes the critical role of Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) teaching in promoting equity, inclusion, and a sense of belonging within the classroom. This teaching approach recognizes and values the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students, viewing these differences not as obstacles, but rather as valuable assets that can enrich the learning environment.

CR-S teaching is rooted in the understanding that students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds significantly influence their learning experiences and outcomes. By incorporating these elements into teaching practices, educators can create more inclusive and engaging learning environments that resonate with all students. This approach can help bridge cultural gaps, enhance understanding, and foster a sense of belonging among students.

The positive impacts of CR-S teaching extend beyond fostering a sense of belonging. It also contributes to improved academic achievement, increased student engagement, and enhanced social-emotional learning outcomes. These benefits underscore the need for a greater emphasis on the implementation and promotion of CR-S teaching practices in schools.

To effectively implement CR-S teaching, schools should prioritize providing teachers with the necessary tools and training. This could involve professional development workshops focused on understanding and appreciating cultural diversity, strategies for incorporating students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds into teaching practices, and ways to form positive, asset-based relationships with students.

Moreover, curricular and instructional practices should be designed to reflect and respect students' identities. This could involve incorporating culturally relevant materials and activities into the curriculum, using teaching methods that align with students' cultural norms and practices, and creating a classroom environment that celebrates diversity and promotes mutual respect.

The significance of cultivating robust, positive teacher-student relationships cannot be overstated. These relationships serve as the foundation for promoting students' social-emotional development and academic achievement. They provide a safe and supportive environment where students can explore, learn, and grow. In the context of social-emotional development, strong teacher-student relationships can help students build confidence, resilience, and emotional intelligence. Teachers who establish positive relationships with their students can better understand their students' unique needs and challenges, enabling them to provide personalized support and guidance. This can lead to improved self-esteem, reduced anxiety, and enhanced social skills among students.

From an academic perspective, these relationships can motivate students to engage more deeply in their learning. When students feel that their teachers genuinely care about their success, they are more likely to take risks, ask questions, and strive for excellence. This can lead to improved academic outcomes, including higher grades, better test scores, and increased graduation rates.

However, it is important to note that not all students have equal access to these beneficial relationships. Research suggests that students from low-income families often have fewer strong relationships with their teachers. This disparity can exacerbate existing educational inequities and hinder these students' academic and social-emotional development. Therefore, schools should prioritize fostering these critical relationships, particularly for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This may include providing teachers with professional development opportunities focused on relationship-building skills. Teachers should be trained to demonstrate caring attitudes, communicate effectively, and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Moreover, teachers should be encouraged to understand and value the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their students. This can help create an inclusive classroom environment where all students feel seen, heard, and valued. By doing so, teachers can significantly contribute to students' feelings of belonging, which in turn can boost their academic success and overall well-being.

The role of schools extends beyond providing education to students; they also serve as a bridge between students' families and the education system. Creating a welcoming climate that encourages meaningful family engagement is crucial, as research consistently links family involvement to increased student academic achievement and overall success. However, fostering such engagement is not always straightforward and can present numerous challenges for educators.

Many educators find engaging families in their children's education to be one of the most challenging aspects of their work. This difficulty may stem from a lack of training or resources, or it could be due to the complexities inherent in navigating diverse family dynamics and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, there is a pressing need for schools to provide educators with the necessary training and resources to effectively engage families. This should include professional development focused on communication skills, cultural competency, and strategies for building strong relationships with families.

In addition to providing support for educators, schools should also strive to create an environment that is conducive to family engagement. This involves addressing potential barriers that may prevent families from becoming involved in their children's education. Logistical issues, such as inconvenient meeting times or lack of transportation, can be significant obstacles for many families. Schools can address these issues by offering flexible meeting times, providing transportation assistance, offering childcare, or utilizing virtual platforms for meetings and conferences.

Linguistic and cultural differences can also pose challenges to family engagement. Schools should make efforts to celebrate cultural diversity and provide translation services to ensure all families can communicate effectively with school staff. Additionally, schools should be sensitive to families' past experiences with educational institutions, which may have been negative. Building trust with these families may require additional time and effort, but it is a crucial step towards meaningful engagement. In addition, regular communication with families is another key aspect of fostering a welcoming climate. Schools should keep families informed about their children's progress, upcoming events, and any issues or concerns that arise. This communication should be bi-directional, with schools also encouraging feedback and input from families.

Traditional exclusionary discipline methods, such as suspensions and expulsions, have been shown to have numerous negative impacts on students. These can include lower academic achievement, increased risk of dropping out, and heightened likelihood of future involvement with the criminal justice system. Furthermore, these methods often disproportionately affect students of color and those with disabilities, thereby exacerbating existing educational inequities. Considering these issues, schools should consider implementing restorative practices as an alternative approach to discipline. Restorative practices shift the focus from punishment to repairing harm and rebuilding relationships. This approach recognizes that misbehavior is often a symptom of underlying issues and seeks to address these root causes rather than simply punishing negative behaviors.

Implementing restorative practices can have numerous benefits for students and the school community. These practices can foster a sense of belonging among students by emphasizing the importance of relationships and community. When students feel that they are valued members of the school community, they are more likely to positively engage in their learning and less likely to engage in disruptive behavior. Restorative practices can also

lead to a reduction in suspensions and other exclusionary discipline measures. By addressing misbehavior through dialogue and mutual understanding, schools can resolve issues without resorting to punitive measures that remove students from the learning environment. This can lead to improved attendance and academic outcomes.

Furthermore, restorative practices can enhance students' social, interpersonal, and emotional skills. Participating in restorative processes requires students to take responsibility for their actions, empathize with others, and work collaboratively to find solutions. These skills are not only beneficial in the school setting but are also valuable life skills that can contribute to students' future success.

Given these benefits, schools should reconsider zero-tolerance policies that mandate exclusionary discipline. While such policies may be intended to maintain order and safety, they often result in harmful consequences for students. Instead, schools should strive to implement more equitable disciplinary strategies, such as restorative practices, that promote a positive school climate and support all students' success.

In conclusion, fostering a sense of belonging among students, teachers, and parents is critical for supporting equity, positive student outcomes, community engagement, and a healthy school climate. Prioritizing the implementation of CR-S teaching, a powerful approach that can transform the learning environment, is key to promoting equity, inclusion, and enhancing academic achievement. Strong, positive teacher-student relationships are another crucial component of effective education, contributing to students' social-emotional development and academic success. Creating a welcoming climate that encourages family engagement is a multifaceted task that requires commitment from the entire school community, but it is essential for improved student outcomes and overall school success. Lastly, the shift from traditional exclusionary discipline methods to restorative practices represents a meaningful change in how schools approach discipline, a change that is necessary to create a more equitable and supportive educational environment for all students. By focusing on these key areas, schools can make significant strides towards achieving these goals.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (FOR HANOVER MEMBERS ONLY)

## STUDENT VOICE, ENGAGEMENT, AND BELONGING

### Systematizing Climates that Elevate Student Voice and a Sense of Safety and Belonging

Explores reasons why students do not report bullying, explores systematized structures for positive school climates, and presents strategies for improving students’ emotional security.

### Best Practices for Increasing Student Engagement

Provides an overview of student engagement, discusses classroom practices and strategies to improve student engagement.

### Best Practices in Disability Inclusive Education

Explains the current legal framework surrounding disability-inclusive education, provides examples that build consensus and buy-in, and reviews high-level strategies and models.

### Establishing Structures for Student Voice

Reviews strategies to obtain student voice at the school, district, and classroom levels, and structural supports for student voice.

### Research Brief and Discussion Guide: Building a Sense of Belonging

Describes key components of belonging and strategies designed to increase community partners’ sense of belonging through pedagogy, communication, and relationship building.

### Raising Community Program Perception/Awareness

Outlines how districts can capture perception data, plan and assess district outreach, create a brand for their school, and implement creative community engagement strategies.

## RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

### Equitable Approaches to K-5 Discipline

Describes research-based best practices for successful disciplinary practices to support district leaders in developing effective and equitable disciplinary systems.

### Strategies for Improving Student Attendance: Policies and Practices

Explores attendance policies and implementation practices that encourage students to attend school and remain engaged.

### Best Practices for Culturally Responsive Inquiry-Based Learning

Defines culturally responsive inquiry-based learning and reviews student outcomes that may result from inquiry-based learning and a culturally responsive pedagogy.

### Implicit Bias and Restorative Justice

Examines national trends in disproportionate school discipline, key concepts and definitions, individual and relational factors, and system-level reforms.

### Bullying Prevention, Tracking, and Messaging

Reviews best practices for prevention, tracking of, and messaging around bullying based on peer-reviewed research, industry publications, and other relevant sources, benchmarks policies and practices among a selection of districts.

### Benchmarking African American Academic Achievement Programs

Spotlights district programs specifically aimed at supporting and fostering African American and Black academic achievement.

### Literature Review: Culturally Responsive Teaching

Outlines the key components of culturally responsive teaching and describes instructional strategies and teacher professional development approaches.

# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A: DEI DIAGNOSTIC RESULTS TABLE AND FIGURES

### SECTION A: OVERALL PERCEPTIONS AND PRIORITIES

	Students	Parents	Staff
Students are proud of their school. <sup>1</sup> (n=21,800-61,206; N=40-57)	67%	76%	73%
Students feel like they are a part of their school community. <sup>1</sup> (n=21,882-62,264; N=40-57)	68%	73%	75%
Students feel welcome at school. <sup>1</sup> (n=22,188-63,586; N=40-57)	77%	83%	86%
Students are proud to attend the school. <sup>2</sup> (n=30,717-101,885; N=35-37)	50%	75%	73%
Students feel like they belong at school. <sup>2</sup> (n=28,954-100,782; N=36-38)	54%	76%	81%
Students feel welcome at school. <sup>2</sup> (n=33,545-113,766; N=37-39)	62%	81%	87%

Note: The table above shows agreement with items in the left column by respondent group. <sup>1</sup> Indicates responses came from the DEIB Diagnostic Survey. <sup>2</sup> Indicates responses came from the K-12 Climate Survey.



# APPENDIX B: STUDENT OUTCOMES DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

## SECTION A: DATA OVERVIEW

FIGURE B.A.1: DISTRICT COUNTS AND STUDENT COUNTS BY SCHOOL YEAR

School Year	District Count	Student Count
2017	48	1,086,738
2018	51	1,097,720
2019	53	1,116,427
2020	52	1,093,034
2021	42	858,596
2022	19	412,520

FIGURE B.A.2: DISTRICT COUNTS BY ENROLLMENT

Enrollment	District Count
Under 10,000	25
10,000 to 19,999	16
20,000+	12



## SECTION B: ATTENDANCE AND BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES

FIGURE B.B.1: RISK OUTCOMES AT ALL DISTRICTS, 2019

	All Students All Students	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Race/Ethnicity Hispanic or Latino (any race)	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White	Gender Female Male	
⬆️ <b>Academic</b>										
ELA/Math Course Failure	13.84%		4.13%	20.76%	20.54%		10.07%	9.09%	10.77%	16.56%
⬆️ <b>Behavioral</b>										
Chronically Absent	17.03%	31.86%	8.31%	21.43%	16.62%		22.03%	14.16%	16.96%	17.43%
Had a Suspension	12.44%	9.36%	3.65%	28.18%	10.31%		14.30%	7.73%	9.71%	15.25%
Had Disciplinary Incident	18.52%	20.79%	8.15%	25.45%	17.39%		22.67%	15.29%	13.98%	22.92%

	All Students All Students	Economically Disadvantaged Econ. Dis. Not Econ. Dis.		English Learner EL Non-EL		Special Education Non-SPED SPED		504 Plan 504 Non-504	
⬆️ <b>Academic</b>									
ELA/Math Course Failure	13.84%	17.04%	8.69%	18.70%	13.05%	13.65%	15.83%	14.71%	12.69%
⬆️ <b>Behavioral</b>									
Chronically Absent	17.03%	19.52%	10.83%	15.62%	17.30%	16.26%	24.82%	17.87%	14.99%
Had a Suspension	12.44%	16.66%	8.47%	9.15%	13.10%	12.06%	18.62%	13.55%	8.38%
Had Disciplinary Incident	18.52%	20.52%	12.21%	15.12%	19.12%	17.35%	27.17%	23.68%	19.63%

FIGURE B.B.2: RISK OUTCOMES AT ALL DISTRICTS, 2022

	All Students All Students	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Race/Ethnicity Hispanic or Latino (any race)	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White	Gender	
									Female	Male
⬆ <b>Academic</b>										
ELA/Math Course Failure	18.02%		6.06%	31.84%	26.20%		10.77%	12.10%	15.74%	20.19%
⬆ <b>Behavioral</b>										
Chronically Absent	37.54%		22.10%	41.18%	36.61%		46.42%	32.59%	37.15%	37.92%
Had a Suspension	10.58%		2.71%	19.19%	8.56%		11.09%	6.84%	8.21%	12.83%
Had Disciplinary Incident	14.77%		7.26%	19.04%	9.26%		20.34%	15.37%	11.71%	17.67%

	All Students All Students	Economically Disadvantaged		English Learner		Special Education		504 Plan	
		Econ. Dis.	Not Econ. Dis.	EL	Non-EL	Non-SPED	SPED	504	Non-504
⬆ <b>Academic</b>									
ELA/Math Course Failure	18.02%	18.50%	10.01%	22.76%	17.27%	17.84%	21.14%		13.88%
⬆ <b>Behavioral</b>									
Chronically Absent	37.54%	37.56%	23.54%	37.84%	37.52%	35.88%	48.86%	37.85%	34.61%
Had a Suspension	10.58%	11.92%	5.18%	8.72%	10.91%	10.50%	17.35%	10.75%	7.62%
Had Disciplinary Incident	14.77%	11.87%	9.11%	9.50%	15.95%	13.56%	22.78%	24.29%	15.51%

# 2023 STATE OF DIVERISTY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, & BELONGING

FIGURE B.B.3: RISK OUTCOMES AT DISTRICTS IN CITIES, 2019

	All Students				Race/Ethnicity				Gender	
	All Students	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino (any race)	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White	Female	Male
⬆ <b>Academic</b>										
ELA/Math Course Failure	14.81%		4.13%	20.35%	20.34%		9.74%	9.78%	11.66%	17.78%
⬆ <b>Behavioral</b>										
Chronically Absent	22.35%		10.43%	31.69%	19.17%		27.52%	19.63%	22.17%	22.53%
Had a Suspension	10.77%	9.13%	1.97%	21.10%	9.04%		12.33%	7.32%	7.65%	13.72%
Had Disciplinary Incident	24.40%	21.08%	9.48%	40.60%	19.21%		29.15%	20.57%	18.62%	29.83%

	All Students	Economically Disadvantaged		English Learner		Special Education		504 Plan	
	All Students	Econ. Dis.	Not Econ. Dis.	EL	Non-EL	Non-SPED	SPED	504	Non-504
⬆ <b>Academic</b>									
ELA/Math Course Failure	14.81%	17.17%	10.58%	18.22%	14.08%	14.90%	15.54%	16.02%	14.14%
⬆ <b>Behavioral</b>									
Chronically Absent	22.35%	22.73%	13.87%	17.39%	23.48%	21.92%	32.47%	20.86%	17.73%
Had a Suspension	10.77%	12.37%	5.16%	7.70%	11.55%	10.29%	17.78%	12.26%	8.98%
Had Disciplinary Incident	24.40%	24.44%	16.40%	18.84%	25.71%	22.99%	33.21%	27.16%	21.28%

## 2023 STATE OF DIVERISTY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, & BELONGING

FIGURE B.B.4: RISK OUTCOMES AT DISTRICTS IN CITIES, 2022

	All Students All Students	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Race/Ethnicity Hispanic or Latino (any race)	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White	Gender Female	Male
⬆ <b>Academic</b>										
ELA/Math Course Failure	17.54%		4.60%	30.12%	25.77%		10.00%	10.99%	15.34%	19.65%
⬆ <b>Behavioral</b>										
Chronically Absent	46.56%		30.97%	59.79%	42.36%		50.01%	38.26%	46.35%	46.76%
Had a Suspension	11.14%		2.84%	19.38%	7.99%		11.36%	7.85%	8.86%	13.29%
Had Disciplinary Incident	22.15%			38.62%	14.30%		23.08%	17.81%	18.01%	26.06%

	All Students All Students	Economically Disadvantaged Econ. Dis.	Not Econ. Dis.	English Learner EL	Non-EL	Special Education Non-SPED	SPED	504 Plan 504	Non-504
⬆ <b>Academic</b>									
ELA/Math Course Failure	17.54%	18.22%	8.94%	21.54%	16.82%	17.54%	19.86%		13.88%
⬆ <b>Behavioral</b>									
Chronically Absent	46.56%	45.39%	27.55%	46.17%	46.65%	46.94%	58.23%	43.78%	37.53%
Had a Suspension	11.14%	11.01%	5.16%	8.57%	11.65%	11.52%	17.71%	9.72%	7.54%
Had Disciplinary Incident	22.15%			17.43%	23.07%	20.84%	29.24%		

FIGURE B.B.5: RISK OUTCOMES AT DISTRICTS IN SUBURBS, 2019

	All Students All Students	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Race/Ethnicity Hispanic or Latino (any race)	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White	Gender Female	Male
<b>Academic</b>										
ELA/Math Course Failure	11.54%				23.41%			7.79%	8.11%	13.00%
<b>Behavioral</b>										
Chronically Absent	12.97%		6.22%	16.16%	15.14%		10.57%	8.57%	12.88%	13.37%
Had a Suspension	14.53%		5.79%	39.01%	11.87%		19.36%	8.05%	12.42%	17.24%
Had Disciplinary Incident	13.18%		6.80%	15.30%	14.81%		10.03%	11.03%	9.62%	16.28%

	All Students All Students	Economically Disadvantaged Econ. Dis.	Not Econ. Dis.	English Learner EL	Non-EL	Special Education Non-SPED	SPED	504 Plan 504	Non-504
<b>Academic</b>									
ELA/Math Course Failure	11.54%	16.02%	5.39%		10.79%	10.75%	16.96%		5.26%
<b>Behavioral</b>									
Chronically Absent	12.97%	17.38%	9.06%	14.06%	12.75%	12.51%	18.70%	14.45%	10.81%
Had a Suspension	14.53%	23.59%	10.50%	11.83%	14.96%	14.14%	20.20%	15.07%	7.52%
Had Disciplinary Incident	13.18%	14.67%	10.50%	9.40%	13.69%	12.25%	20.55%	20.36%	16.57%

FIGURE B.B.6: RISK OUTCOMES AT DISTRICTS IN SUBURBS, 2022

	All Students All Students	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Race/Ethnicity Hispanic or Latino (any race)	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White	Gender Female	Male
<b>Behavioral</b>										
Chronically Absent	27.69%			29.00%	31.23%			20.93%	27.12%	28.23%
Had a Suspension	8.74%			18.31%	11.82%			4.73%	5.97%	11.39%
Had Disciplinary Incident	8.29%			9.44%	5.88%			10.99%	6.21%	10.27%

	All Students All Students	Economically Disadvantaged Econ. Dis.	Not Econ. Dis.	English Learner EL	Non-EL	Special Education Non-SPED	SPED	504 Plan 504	Non-504
<b>Behavioral</b>									
Chronically Absent	27.69%	33.20%	21.42%		27.14%	26.67%	36.37%		
Had a Suspension	8.74%	14.53%	5.33%	10.61%	8.71%	7.56%	15.91%		
Had Disciplinary Incident	8.29%	8.89%	7.60%	3.77%	9.40%	7.51%	14.65%		



## ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Allen, K.-A. "The Science of School Belonging." Psychology Today, 2022. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sense-belonging/202201/the-science-school-belonging>

<sup>3</sup> Grossman, J.B. and X.A. Portilla. "District-Level Strategies to Improve Students' Sense of Belonging in School." *Solutions for Educational Equity Through Social and Emotional Well-Being*, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Allen, Op. cit.

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<sup>8</sup> [1] Larson et al., Op. cit., p. 154. [2] Byrd, Op. cit. [3] Paris, Op. cit. [4] Paris and Alim, Op. cit.

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## AUTHORS

### SUSAN GROUNDWATER

Dr. Susan Groundwater has far-reaching experience as a K-12 educator. She has taught language arts and history at the elementary and secondary levels, served as a department chairperson, lead mentor for new teachers, and provided professional development for teachers and administrators on a variety of topics including differentiation for diverse learners, equitable access to gifted programming for diverse learners, identifying underserved populations for gifted services, and teaching history through problem-based learning. In her capacity as a school leader, Dr. Groundwater worked extensively to foster inclusive and equitable learning environments, support student connectedness, and to facilitate a culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogical approach to teaching. Dr. Groundwater is also an adjunct faculty member at George Mason University where she teaches graduate courses that focus on understanding culture and equity-related perspectives on education processes, equity trends and issues of the school setting, exploring education issues through a critical lens that emphasizes culture, diversity, language, and gender, and examining literacy theory by addressing sociocultural influences on literacy development.

### FAN JIANG

In 2014, Dr. Fan Jiang joined Hanover Research as a senior researcher in Data Analytics after completing his Ph.D. in Economics from the University of California, Irvine. Over his nine years at Hanover, Dr. Jiang has worked with school districts across the country to examine their data to uncover insights on student wellbeing, behavior, and progress. He is passionate about finding accessible ways to visualize and analyze data to help districts achieve their goals. In 2020, Dr. Jiang and his team designed an interactive dashboard that highlights gaps and disproportionalities in outcomes across

student groups, school sites, grades, and years. Dozens of Hanover members have completed this data analysis, which laid the foundation for their DEIB work. The insights from the data help drive conversations between districts and their communities and collaboration between Hanover and its members on further research.

### BRITTNEY BECKER

Dr. Brittney Becker has over 10 years of experience in survey design and research methods across diverse topics with six years dedicated specifically to education research. Dr. Becker's graduate work included advanced coursework in research methods, experimental design, and statistics. At Hanover, Dr. Becker supports our education partners through research design, survey development, and executing data analysis on a variety of education, interpersonal, and personnel-related topics including equity and inclusion, strategic planning, and school climate and culture. Dr. Becker received a Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Texas A&M University, an M.A. in Experimental Psychology from University of Central Oklahoma, and a B.A. in Psychology from Oklahoma State University.

### JOY GITTER

A senior member of Hanover's K-12 secondary research team, Ms. Joy Gitter has seven years of experience providing K-12 leaders with research-based insights to support effective decision-making. Ms. Gitter has seen firsthand how decisions at the national, state, and local levels continuously shape and reshape educational dynamics, impacting equitable access, opportunities, and outcomes for students and necessitating an equity perspective when framing and assessing solutions. Ms. Gitter is passionate about diversity, equity, and inclusion in education and is committed to using her research and analysis skills to support research-based improvements to students' educational experiences. Ms. Gitter received her Ed.M. in Education Policy from Harvard University and holds a B.A. in Sociology and Public Policy from Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

### KENYA SHUJAA

Ms. Kenya Shujaa is a trained anthropologist and social services provider with over 14 years of practical experience in the K-12 sector. Ms. Shujaa obtained training in research design and implementation, including instrument and protocol design, data collection and analysis, and report creation while earning a B.A. in Anthropology at Howard University and an M.A. in Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. Ms. Shujaa has served as an adjunct faculty at Widener University and Community College of Philadelphia, where her courses included "Introduction to Biological Anthropology," "Introduction to Sociology", "Sociology of Ethnic and Minority Group Relations", "Introduction to Anthropology" and "Introduction to Cultural Anthropology." Ms. Shujaa has also extensively worked with diverse student and parent populations in non-profit and K-12 settings, including developing and overseeing the implementation of ELA and STEM curricula, serving on school Curriculum and Climate committees in the Philadelphia School District, developing and executing a school-based case management model for at-risk students and families, advocating for students in the juvenile court system, leading parent, family, and community outreach, creating and overseeing service learning and social and emotional learning initiatives, and collecting, analyzing, and presenting data regarding student achievement, behavior, and engagement. As a Senior Research Consultant in the K-12 Division at Hanover Research, Ms. Shujaa oversees the use of robust qualitative and mixed-methodologies to highlight solutions for issues including academic equity, school climate, culture, safety and security, educational technology, staff satisfaction and retention, student voice, social and emotional learning, and special education.