The release of the 2019 CA School Dashboard data resulted in four school districts becoming eligible for Systemic Instructional Review (SIR) Support from CCEE, among them is Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). LEAs meet the criteria established by Section 52072 and pursuant to subdivision (g) of Section 52064.5 (CA School Dashboard) whereby three or more pupil groups identified pursuant to Section 52052 did not make progress based on the CA School Dashboard. For OUSD, these student groups include African American students, students experiencing homelessness, and English learners. The following executive summary provides an overview of the SIR purpose and process, data collection and overall findings of the OUSD SIR, and recommended action steps that will be used by CCEE to advise and assist the district.

SIR Purpose and Background

The purpose of a SIR is to identify strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities (SWOT) in the implementation of instructional initiatives and practices of an LEA through a series of data collection activities. The SIR culminates in recommended action steps that are designed to assist districts in creating coherence throughout the system by supporting a strong focus on instruction, developing collaborative cultures, enhancing deeper learning, and establishing accountability throughout the system. These recommended actions are intended to serve the district as a roadmap to systemic instructional improvement.

The LEA’s first step, post the SIR, is to prioritize the SIR action steps from the report including the development of a plan for stakeholder communication. Recommendations/action steps are interconnected so they can be collectively leveraged to provide opportunity for the district to engage in cycles of continuous improvement, and inform the CCEE in the progress-monitoring role as evidence to verify completion. CCEE has a continuum of resources to assist and advise the district in this process to identify more specific supports needed to implement the SIR actions to improve student outcomes. Activities driven by the SIR should ideally align other district and site level plans around priorities, actions, and progress-monitoring data indicators. As defined in EDC §52072, CCEE’s role is to determine the capacity of the school district to implement the recommendations (identified as action steps within the SIR) and therefore will monitor and communicate the progress of the district on the implementation of SIR actions and recommendations specifically the district, COE, State Superintendent of Public Instruction and State Board of Education twice a year (fall and spring).
Data Collection

Data collection for this review began in February 2020 and consisted of a comprehensive document review of instructional artifacts and policy documents and individual interviews with leadership staff including governing board members. The collection process was then interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the closure of schools and transition to virtual learning. Data collection resumed in September 2020 which resulted in (43) interviews with individuals in various leadership roles across the district, (13) stakeholder groups including students, families, teachers, support staff, school administrators, labor partners, and community committees/groups. It is important to note that attempts were made to gather the input of HY families through targeted focus groups, unfortunately, none were able to attend. Therefore this is an area to return to as part of the post SIR implementation to provide input on progress monitoring and recommended actions.

December 2020, teams of CCEE staff members conducted virtual classroom visits in 11 schools and 61 classrooms. Prior to site visits, CCEE staff reviewed all documents submitted by OUSD to support instructional efforts. Additional documents were added and reviewed during the period of virtual school and classroom visits and interviews. Through this comprehensive approach, CCEE staff were able to triangulate multiple data points in an effort to validate the collected data set and individual items.

CCEE acknowledges that OUSD, like many districts across the state and nation, is working through distance learning and planning for students returning to school. CCEE will visit school sites and classrooms after in-school instruction resumes. The data gathered, at that point, will be incorporated into the ongoing support and progress monitoring of the implementation of SIR actions.

Summary of Findings

Situated in the Bay Area, Oakland Unified School District consists of 48 elementary schools, five K-8, 12 middle schools, three 6-12, one 6-12 alternative, seven high schools, six high school alternatives, and one independent study school, for a total of 76 sites housing 83 district-run schools. The district enrollment in 2019/2020 was approximately 35,000 students in district-run schools. In addition, there are 33 district-authorized charter schools that are not represented in this report. The data for 2019/2020 provided the following data: 71.2% of the students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch, 13.5% SWD, 0.25% of students experiencing homelessness, and 32.9% English learners. The district is led by a superintendent who has led the district for three years and has a rich history of experience at multiple levels within the district.

The SIR report serves to focus accountability on improved student outcomes. In OUSD the specific focus is on African American students (AAs), English learners (ELs), and students experiencing homelessness (HY). Although the primary focus is on these three student populations, there is a recognition that these groups function in the context of the whole. With this
in mind, the report addresses equity through systemness. Systemness is defined as an "overall mindset . . . a commitment to contributing to, and benefitting from, the larger system." (Fullan, 2014, p.5).

In addition, the district has been working on stabilizing its financial status considering the impact of declining enrollment and the priorities stated in the LCAP. These LCAP priorities and financial decisions are designed to support the increased number of unduplicated student populations, as recommended in the November 2019 California State Auditor's Report. The actions outlined in the SIR are in support of the district’s continued pathway to financial health and achievement of LCAP goals, which includes engagement with ACOE on the Intensive Support and Technical Assistance (ISTA) and Differentiated Assistance support they have been providing.

Overall, OUSD has multiple plans that are aligned with the district vision and include goals, metrics processes, and outcomes that serve to focus the instruction for all students and various student populations. However, coherence on what the instructional goals are and what is expected at the classroom level still remains a significant barrier. The Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) outlines the district’s focus in many areas. The Instructional Focus Plan, 2019-2022, developed in collaboration with ACOE, outlines the expected instructional focus for all schools. Building out from those plans are other plans that support the implementation of the LCAP and Instructional Focus Plan, for example, English Language Learner and Multilingual Achievement (ELLMA) Roadmap Plan, Annual Plan, and the Literacy Plan. The challenge the district faces is integrating these plans into a cohesive and coherent message with a shared focus that creates connections for district departments, networks, and schools for their implementation.

Although addressing instructional coherence is critical, the understanding of what are practices and procedures that will remain tight and loose at all levels of the district also must be addressed to ensure a commonly understood degree of quality of instruction in every classroom, support to attain quality is provided, and to attain OUSD’s equity-driven agenda. Autonomy and accountability was found to be misunderstood by many in the system, which in regard to instruction can perpetuate inequities and can make it difficult to set and meet goals. There is a path forward for OUSD to recalibrate school autonomy by clarifying, especially in the area of
Summary of Findings (Continued)

instruction, how attaining student achievement outcomes is what connects the district, networks, and schools. This must also come with a clear understanding of accountability measures that communicate reciprocal accountability, at all levels, and enacts focus, celebration, and problem solving.

While the SIR process began prior to school closures in mid-March 2020, the instructional challenges of distance learning for all students need to be considered when reading this report. There are added levels of consideration that did not exist in the pre-COVID-19 world including: meeting the needs for digital equity for all students in terms of devices, internet access, and bandwidth; instructional design considerations that must now be met by all teachers for engaging students; and ensuring equitable inclusive practices for the district’s ELs, AAs, and HY, which are the district’s triggering factors for the SIR process. The SIR team has identified the following findings, which are reported in the form of identifying the district’s overall strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. These items will be discussed in detail in Section VII of the OUSD SIR Report, which addresses the 12 instructional components of the SIR.

Strengths

• Stakeholders feel that engagement opportunities are improving.
• The district has a robust data system that is responsive to flexible needs and is known for its mapping systems.
• The district is recognized by districts within and outside of California for programs such as the African American Male Achievement (AAMA) initiative, English Learner programs, Linked Learning, Community Schools, etc.
• The Office of Equity is a voice for the underrepresented communities within the district and highly regarded by some stakeholders. The system can learn from these communities, and they can help integrate equity throughout instructional priorities and targets.
• The district has taken steps to seek and leverage funding from outside organizations and community partners focused on instructional initiatives. The support enriches the system’s ability to serve its students (Outside funding is also a threat, see below).
• community partners focused on instructional initiatives. The support enriches the system’s ability to serve its students (Outside funding is also a threat, see below).

Weaknesses

• There is a misalignment, acknowledged by multiple stakeholders, between district plans and the ways in which they are implemented at school sites.
• There are limited structures for accountability at the central office, network, and site levels regarding district instructional priorities.
• Perceived site autonomies impact the implementation of district plans in the areas of curriculum, centralized professional development, and measurement of student progress.
Weaknesses

• Numerous stakeholders acknowledged that continuous external crises, e.g., the budget and the pandemic, have negatively impacted OUSD's ability to implement initiatives strategically.
• There is a lack of structures to learn from successful schools or initiatives within OUSD.
• There is a perception, not borne out by data, that the OUSD leadership pipeline and support system is challenged by the rate of principal changes.
• There is a perception that OUSD is challenged in hiring and retaining teachers of color. In this case, data indicate that the largest task in aligning demographic balance is between Latinx teachers and the Latinx student population.
• There needs to be an increased effort for OUSD to move beyond engaging its stakeholders to one in which a common understanding of a few key priorities regarding instructional outcomes and pupil achievement is clear.
• There also needs to be an effort to focus collective energy with stakeholders in supporting OUSD's instructional vision for all students with an eye on meeting these outcomes.
• The branding and marketing of OUSD, while improving, needs greater refinement and attention to multiple ways of delivering its communications to families, most especially families who may have language or technology barriers.

Threats

• The continuity and maintenance of some supports and programs are threatened by expiring grants and funding, which creates built-in instability.
• Decisions on funding of supports (e.g., staffing, materials, professional learning) for programs at the district and school level must be aligned with the district’s strategic agenda, the Instructional Focus Plan (IFP), and the School Plans for Student Achievement (SPSAs) and include a plan for sustainability when funding expires.
• Diverse advocacies with opposing views and differing agendas impact the district’s ability to remain focused on the instructional priorities. Further, the emphasis of these community groups and organizations is largely on social services without a clear connection to how these services will support student academic outcomes.
• Stakeholders perceived that transitions or changes in the teacher and principal corps threaten the quality and stability of services at school sites. This perception is not always supported by data.
• The lack of clear guidelines on site level autonomy prevents system-wide implementation of the instructional vision.
• School sites that are declining in enrollment and have the potential for less resources are at risk of sustaining efforts to assure that key programs and student supports remain in place.
• Oakland does not lack basic systems; rather, the district lacks consistent and systemic implementation of foundational agreements of what is expected of all schools, e.g., instructional programs, PBIS, MTSS, etc., and how the central office and the networks support them and hold them, and themselves, accountable for attaining these.
Opportunities

- Historically OUSD has gone through multiple leadership changes. The current senior district leadership is perceived as stable and credible by most stakeholders. Many senior leadership positions are filled by long-time OUSD educators. Consistency in leadership that leverages experience and credibility is a strength; whether leadership is developed from within or not, there is also an opportunity to leverage new thinking.
- The district has the opportunity to use learning from various previously implemented programs, such as the Early Literacy work or Restorative Justice work, to bring the best outcomes and most effective practices to scale and limit the number of initiatives that are not focused on the instructional priorities and strategies.
- The district has an opportunity to standardize expectations on the strategic use of data to drive aligned cycles of inquiry throughout the system and hold itself accountable to improved student outcomes, particularly for ELs, AAs, and HY.
- The Instructional Focus Plan, crafted in cooperation with the Alameda County Office of Education, provides the foundation and coherence for instruction for schools districtwide and clarifies the expectations and resources for the central office, networks, and schools to attain pupil achievement outcomes.
- The district has an opportunity to develop a program-effectiveness rubric grounded in the learning from programs and pilots, e.g., some of the practices of Restorative Justice, Community Schools, etc. Again, it must be emphasized that the focus should be on best practices vs. specific programs. The goal would be to ensure maximum return on investment for student outcomes, especially academic achievement. This would support decision-making about budgets and resourcing to improve student outcomes, particularly for ELs, AAs, and HY.
- There is an opportunity to clarify the role of committees, both internal and external, with a focus on purpose: to inform, advise, or decide. The Defined Autonomy draft begins that process for school-based committees.
- OUSD has an opportunity to leverage outside funding that is aligned to the district’s strategic agenda, the Instructional Focus Plan (IFP), and SPSAs. Consideration should be given to the potential for funding to be sustainable. Clear grant guidelines for seeking new funding should focus on outside funding being aligned to district plans and on promoting funding sustainability.

Recommendations/Actions

The SIR actions found next are organized by the 12 SIR Instructional Components. One of the first steps for the district will be to review the SIR actions found below to identify and align priority actions. Although provided as discrete actions, many of the actions are complementary, cascade to other actions, and can be prioritized to leverage a group of actions. In addition to CCEE’s role in progress monitoring of the implementation of SIR actions, and based on the interest of the district, CCEE can continue to advise and assist the district. CCEE would then work with the district, in partnership with the county office of education, to prioritize actions and as appropriate assist with identifying supports for the district.
1. Culture, Coherence, and the Planning Process

- **1A)** Analyze the effects of existing school autonomies on student outcomes, perhaps with support from an outside partner, to inform the district’s policy on autonomy.
- **1B)** After analyzing the effects of existing school autonomies on student outcomes, finalize and implement OUSD’s draft of its Defined Autonomy Framework, which operationalizes the directions contained in Board Policy 6006. Part of this process should be to reach common agreement and shared understanding of how school autonomies in OUSD support better outcomes for students.
- **1C)** Identify an Instructional Equity Framework that 1) extends from the instructional plan and, when finalized, the strategic plan 2) defines what equity and anti-racist practices look like at the central office, network, school site, and classroom levels, and 3) includes an equity matrix for leaders to use in decision-making.
- **1D)** In an effort to make OUSD’s vast data resources more accessible, build an Equity Dashboard that standardizes a data set from the indicators on p. 5 of the Instructional Plan. This dashboard would make public the network and school actions to address disproportionality, systemic racism, and explicit and implicit bias.
- **1E)** Set expectations for a culture of continuous improvement at school sites based on regular implementation of short cycles of inquiry grounded in data.
- **1F)** Set the expectation that full implementation of MTSS practices at all school sites will support OUSD’s focus on serving the needs of the whole child.
- **1G)** Set the expectation that, as a system, all organizational decisions and data monitoring mechanisms will utilize the tenets of the Strategic Plan being finalized as well as the Instructional Focus Plan.
- **1H)** Ensure that all communications within the system and with stakeholders are grounded in the tenets of the finalized Strategic Plan and the Instructional Focus Plan.
- **1I)** Require school leaders to engage in training on facilitating dialogue on race, racism, white supremacy, and anti-Blackness.
- **1J)** Develop an expectation that schools will begin to initiate inclusive strategies such as Equity Walks to evaluate their culture and climate (for an example see https://west.edtrust.org/data-equity-walk-toolkit/)

2. Curriculum, Learning, and Support

- **2A)** The central office is to outline the non-negotiables in the selection of curricular materials to ensure all students receive instruction using curricular tools that are standards-aligned, rigorous, and culturally relevant.
- **2B)** Revisit and revise the draft “Defined Autonomy” policy to define and implement a coherent approach to autonomy in curriculum selection as well as accountabilities for at the site level (teachers), network level (principals), and district level (network superintendents). As recommended in action 1A, potentially partner with an outside organization well versed in earned school autonomy to define the concept of autonomy and establish agreed-upon guardrails, monitoring, and support structures.
2. Curriculum, Learning, and Support (Continued)

- **2C)** The central office should provide required professional development in all curricular areas and integrate the explicit teaching of reading, ELD, and academic language strategies.
- **2D)** The network structure should examine how it will be used to provide differentiated support and monitoring of the implementation of a systemwide literacy focus and implement a consistent model across the different networks.
- **2E)** Use the CCEIS plan and the Early Literacy plans as opportunities to build a systemwide literacy focus, grounded in a Multitiered System of Support, that identifies specific measurable literacy goals at each level.

3. Instructional Practice and Strategies

- **3A)** Build on the district’s instructional focus plan working with the central office, networks, and schools to clarify instructional non-negotiables related to priorities for the district. These non-negotiables would focus on systemwide instructional and engagement practices to ensure all students experience meaningful and relevant instructional tasks that support student mastery of content standards. Non-negotiables should include common expectations of instructional practice (across networks and schools), minimum cycles of inquiry school teams engage in, the central office having a set minimum of improvement goals from one cycle of inquiry to another, and a set number of common strategies to support students.
- **3B)** As recommended in 1A, define the concept of autonomy, possibly with the support of an outside organization, and establish agreed upon guardrails, monitoring, and support structures. Given this definition, revisit and revise the draft “Defined Autonomy” policy to define and implement a coherent approach to autonomy as well as accountabilities for instructional practices at the site level (teachers), network level (principals), and district level (network superintendents).
- **3C)** Connect the Instructional Focus Plan to existing professional practices within the district that have resulted in improved outcomes for targeted populations. Use successful models within the district to scale the work at the central office and increase schools accessing them.
- **3D)** Expand policies, professional learning, and implementation of culturally relevant practices utilized by AAMA teachers that allow students to feel safe and respected and to engage in learning intended to improve AA students’ academic outcomes.

4. Social-Emotional and Behavioral Health and Development

- **4A)** Identify the criteria for measuring the success of social-emotional programs, i.e., student outcomes, attendance, reduction in discipline referrals, etc. to determine what programs should be either transitioned to a close, remain as pilots, or recognized for greater scale.
- **4B)** Identify social-emotional practices, based on established criteria and evidence of effectiveness, that will be reflected in the instructional focus plan and to make decisions on what practices should be scaled or expanded as schools consider their specific SEL needs.
4. Social-Emotional and Behavioral Health and Development (Continued)

- **4C)** Develop tools for schools to use to analyze the data in the area of social-emotional learning and identify what SEL practices and supports should be implemented to meet the identified needs of the student population as identified in the school’s SPSA.

- **4D)** Examine the data to clearly identify homeless youth to allow for intentionality in the connecting of academic, social-emotional, and physical well being supports, and then put structures in place so case management can occur. This could also include community and city service providers. Consider connecting with ACOE to support the development of this approach.

5. Assessment and Accountability

- **5A)** Clarify the non-negotiables for school sites related to assessment and accountabilities that are aligned to the district’s priorities. Non-negotiables might include a common set of assessment metrics, minimum cycles of inquiry, minimum improvement goals from one cycle of inquiry to another, set number of common strategies to support AAs, ELs, and HY, and the role of the network superintendent, executive directors, site leaders, and Instructional Leadership Teams in these short cycles of inquiry.

- **5B)** Continue to build clarity, coherence, and capacity across the district, central office, and schools in cycles of inquiry so that local ILTs may develop agency and ownership in improving outcomes for the most impacted groups: AAs, ELs, and HY.

- **5C)** As recommended in 1A, define the concept of autonomy, possibly with the support of an outside organization, and establish agreed upon guardrails, monitoring, and support structures. Given this definition, revisit and revise the draft “Defined Autonomy” policy to define and implement a coherent approach to autonomy as well as districtwide common formative assessments (formative/summative), goal setting, accountabilities, and monitoring at the site, network, and district levels.

- **5D)** Implement districtwide, rigorous, standards-aligned common formative assessments to be used in cycles of inquiry to measure impact on student learning, particularly for impacted groups: AAs, ELs, and HY.

- **5E)** Set guidelines and expectations for system-wide data dashboard usage in conjunction with formative, interim, and summative assessments.

6. Student and Family Engagement

- **6A)** Shape family and student engagement efforts to include public recognition and appreciation of the level of engagement from families/caregivers, students, and advocacy groups to date, while simultaneously shifting to a tighter focus on envisioning how those groups could engage in supporting OUSD’s instructional vision, the coming Strategic Plan, and the Instructional Focus Plan.

- **6B)** Create a communication and engagement plan that details what effective two-way family/caregiver relationships and communication looks like at the central, network, school site, and classroom level. Include persons responsible and timelines.
6. Student and Family Engagement (Continued)

- **6C)** Ensure that site leaders receive differentiated support and professional learning to help them facilitate family/caregiver engagement and communication.
- **6D)** With some programs and support personnel involved in family and student engagement facing potential cuts due to budget or the ending of outside support, OUSD should focus targeted professional development opportunities to build capacity for family and student engagement. The goal would be to soften the direct impact of any potential cuts by examining current positions to see where the work can be integrated.

7. School-based Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs)

- **7A)** Revisit draft “Defined Autonomy” policy to define and implement a coherent approach to autonomy as it relates to ILTs and other district leadership teams to include goal setting, accountabilities, and monitoring of team effectiveness.
- **7B)** Create cohesive documents that integrate the goals from the LCAP, Instructional Focus Plan, and CCEIS plan that can be used to drive the work of the ILTs at each level of the system. These documents might include placemats, posters, guiding documents, etc.
- **7C)** As noted in component 5, continue to build clarity, coherence, and capacity across the district, central office, and schools in cycles of inquiry, so that school-based ILTs may develop agency and ownership in improving outcomes for most impacted groups: AAs, ELs, and HY.
- **7D)** Provide professional learning on the purpose, structure, goals, and implementation of ILTs to help stakeholders understand how to plan, facilitate, and be an active participant of an ILT.
- **7E)** Use already existing peer structures (e.g., principal/network check-ins, PAC meetings, etc.) to share ILT progress and practices.

8. Administrative Coaching and Leadership

- **8A)** Develop and implement a differentiated model of school leadership development, coaching, and supervision where the needs and experiences of principals, assistant principals, community school managers, lead teachers, etc. are taken into consideration and guide their development.
- **8B)** Develop and implement a system of gathering leadership needs for growth, professional learning, and coaching.
- **8C)** Clarify expectations related to minimum coaching sessions to build leadership and the relationship between coaching and student outcomes with attention to AA, EL, and HY populations.

9. Professional Learning and Coaching

- **9A)** Provide differentiated professional learning and support to schools, increasing district involvement with schools whose outcomes continue to decline for AAs, ELs, and students experiencing homelessness.
9. Professional Learning and Coaching (Continued)

- **9B)** Revisit draft “Defined Autonomy” policy to define and implement a coherent approach to autonomy/accountability for professional learning, cycles of inquiry, and PLCs that lead to improved outcomes for targeted populations.
- **9C)** Establish systems for providing feedback to school sites and classrooms on the implementation of strategies, concepts, and practices acquired through professional learning that supports district priorities.

10. Data Management and Use and Student Information Systems

- **10A)** Clearly define, model, and monitor how student-level data is used at the school level to support acceleration, prevention, and intervention. This should include a review of the purpose and effective use of cycles of inquiry in a continuous improvement model. It is important to include the disaggregation of data to the populations of ELs, AAs, and HY.
- **10B)** Provide Protocols for standards-based data digs for teachers to ensure the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
- **10C)** Continue to build clarity, coherence, and capacity across the district, central office, and schools in cycles of inquiry with a focus on AAs, ELs, and HY by outlining how cycles of inquiry are used at the central, network, and school level.
- **10D)** Provide professional learning on the use of data in a Cycle of Inquiry to inform instructional practice and define accountabilities for the practices at various levels of the system, teachers, ILTs, networks, and central office.

11. District and Leadership Capacity

- **11A)** Finalize and implement OUSD’s draft of its Defined Autonomy Framework, which operationalizes the directions contained in Board Policy 6006.
- **11B)** In order to differentiate the learning and coaching needs of a diverse group of school leaders, OUSD should set guidelines and provide network support for administrators to co-design short cycles of inquiry to focus their professional learning needs.
- **11C)** In order to avoid central’s PD demands overriding school plans, set district PD plans earlier in the year and support sites in aligning their school plans with the district’s instructional vision and goals.
- **11D)** Seek to hire and retain more Latinx school site leaders to better align leader and student demographics.
- **11E)** Seek to identify individuals at all levels of the system who can serve OUSD as exemplars of model leadership for achieving OUSD’s instructional vision and Instructional Focus Plan.
- **11F)** Set the expectation that site leaders will lead their teams in cycles of inquiry and outcome-focused accountability conversations.
- **11G)** Set the expectation that the district will work to seek common agreement on how results of ongoing measurement of leadership culture, coherence, and professional learning are to be integrated across the system.
12. Governance Support with Instruction

- **12A)*** Re-examine board policy on school site autonomy to clarify how schools are to balance their autonomy with OUSD’s instructional vision and to align with the Instructional Focus Plan’s Building Blocks. As recommended in other components related to autonomy, consider partnering with an outside agency specializing in autonomy.

- **12B)*** With new governing board members joining the OUSD board, a board retreat and work sessions should be held, in collaboration with OUSD’s superintendent, to get grounded in a shared vision of student achievement and to clarify roles and expectations for attaining this vision.

- **12C)*** Seek opportunities for building board members’ capacity to support the efforts of the administration to assure the use of data and performance metrics that guide instructional improvement.

- **12D)*** Prioritize sustaining practices, rather than specific programs, that have improved achievement for EL, AA, and HY and are moving OUSD in the right outcome-based direction.

To access the full Oakland Unified SIR Report along with the actions listed by themes, [click here](#).
References

