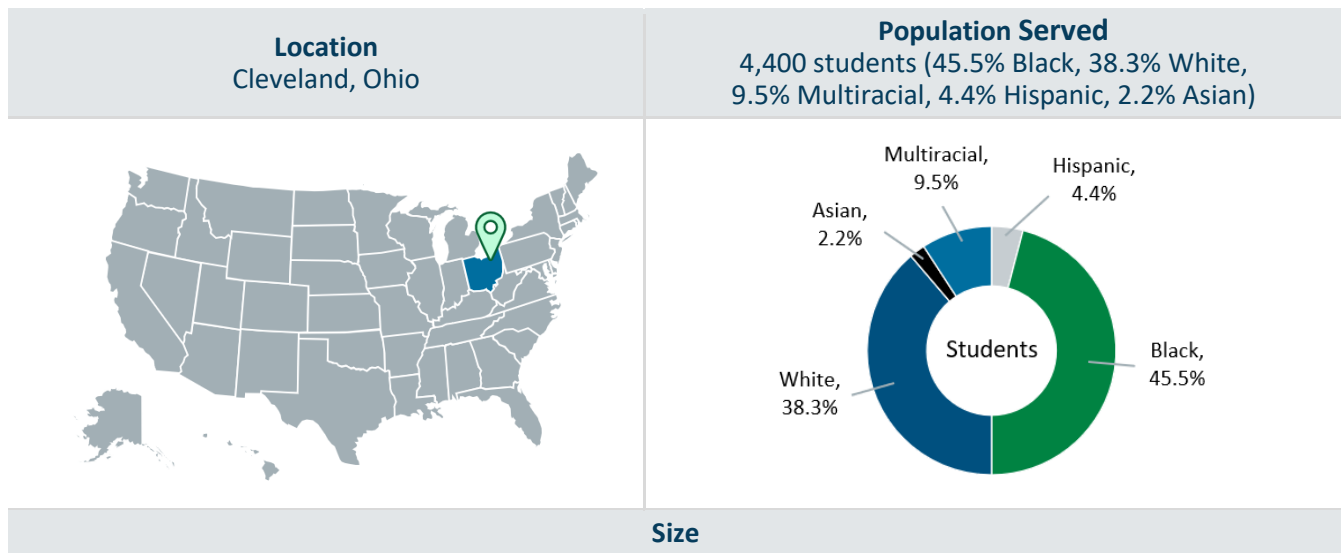


MEMBER PROFILE

Shaker Heights City School District



Organization Type: Public School District



5 elementary schools, 1 middle school, and 1 high school



How Does Shaker Heights City School District Work Toward Desegregation and Integration?

The Shaker Heights City School District (SHCSD) includes seven schools that serve students living in the city of Shaker Heights, a southeastern residential suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. SHCSD is the first public school district in greater Cleveland, and one of only seven districts in the country, to provide the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program to students in all grade levels.

Current desegregation and integration efforts in the school district started taking shape in 2016 through the work of a district-appointed **equity task force**, which included different stakeholder groups representing parents, faculty, and staff and community members. The equity task force developed an **educational equity policy** that was approved by the Board of Education in 2018 and became the foundation for strategic planning toward educational equity in the district. The policy outlines a set of guiding principles to help the Board promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in teaching and learning, discipline and school climate, budgeting and resource allocation, and hiring and retaining staff. The district assigned a **strategic advisory board**, which included community

stakeholder representation, with the responsibility of using the educational equity policy to develop a strategic plan.

In 2020, the district superintendent and Shaker Heights Board of Education adopted a **5-year strategic plan** to advance district goals. While strategies to promote educational equity are embedded across all of the goals, one of the strategic plan goals is to “advance educational equity by disrupting and removing institutional structures and practices that have historically been associated with racism, oppression, and other forms of marginalization.” The strategic plan guides implementation for systemwide practices that support implementation of the district’s educational equity policy through various desegregation and integration efforts, including:

- **Refining course offerings and student assignment practices** to facilitate desegregation and inclusive learning environments through such efforts as *detracking* (i.e., intentionally keeping pupils of different academic abilities in the same classroom),
- **Staff recruitment and professional development** to support recruitment and retention of teachers from underrepresented demographic groups,
- **Review of curricular and extracurricular materials and activities** to ensure inclusion of diverse populations and perspectives in alignment with district goals and objectives, and
- **Establishing discipline protocols and practices** to reduce the amount of classroom time missed by students of color because of disciplinary action.



Spotlight on SHCSD’s Approach: Continuous Learning and Improvement to Guide Implementation of Desegregation and Integration Efforts

Ongoing learning and improvement to support desegregation and integration efforts are key features of SHCSD’s approach to realizing its strategic plan. Under Goal 3 of the plan, “Quality Assurance,” SHCSD is engaging in systemwide continuous learning and improvement efforts embedded throughout all aspects of desegregation and integration activities. Continuous learning and improvement guide the implementation of several desegregation and integration efforts, including detracking, staff professional development, and instructional curriculum and protocols. To guide continuous learning and improvement activities and data collection, the strategic plan establishes a quality assurance system to review, assess, and strengthen support of student learning in departments across the district—including business and operations, human resources, finance, and facilities—to ensure alignment with district goals and objectives.

Detracking

Academic tracking in schools is a practice of assigning students to courses with higher or lower levels of academic rigor based on initial testing of ability and academic preparedness. In SHCSD, as racial integration increased in schools, so did academic tracking. As schools became more racially integrated beginning in the 1960s, families sought tracked course levels (e.g., enriched or advanced course pathways) that largely maintained racial and socioeconomic homogeneity in courses. For decades, SHCSD community members, students, and staff understood this racial segregation to be problematic,

but they struggled to identify ways to integrate courses in ways that would be politically palatable. The SHCSD superintendent, Dr. David Glasner, put it this way:

“One of the things that we noticed as part of our equity policy and strategic plan, was that the building itself might be integrated or diverse, but that integration or that diversity stopped at the classroom door. We noticed that often we had segregated classes for a variety of reasons. That’s one of the reasons why we really felt strongly that we needed to look at our course leveling practices and our course assignment practices to ensure that our classrooms are comprised of heterogeneous demographic groups throughout a student’s educational career at Shaker.”

SHCSD continuous learning and improvement efforts to refine course offerings and student assignment practices helped to identify detracking as an approach to create desegregated and inclusive learning environments. Detracking is the practice of removing academic track requirements for students to access honors or Advanced Placement courses. This approach intentionally keeps pupils of different academic abilities in the same classroom, to ensure a diverse student body that can learn together in an integrated setting. Between 2013 and 2020, the district seriously began to consider detracking. Almost immediately after the adoption of the new strategic plan, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and districts were encouraged to schedule students in small pods, or cohorts, to limit the spread of the disease. Since students in advanced course pods would have no opportunities to integrate with students in non-advanced course levels, senior district administrators recognized that tracked courses would essentially segregate students entirely by race for the complete duration of the school day and school year. At that point, senior district administrators decided to detrack classes in Grades 5–8 and preserve the option of having students learn in person in integrated settings once the pandemic ended.

To ensure detracking continues to advance desegregation and integration, SHCSD uses a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) that are measured and reviewed periodically; these indicators change to reflect annual progress. As an example, the KPI for algebra is, *the percentage of students in subgroups that are scoring advanced or accelerated by the end of the 8th grade will increase as compared to the prior school year*. KPIs are disaggregated by subgroups based on demographic measures of race and ethnicity, students with special needs, or students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals, as well as based on population density of the school setting. While teachers continue to get more expertise and experience teaching in detracked settings, Dr. Glasner shared,

“We have seen some promising data emerging. As an example, we had approximately ... a little more than 50% ... of our Black eighth-grade math students meet proficiency on the eighth-grade algebra exam. That’s a year earlier than they’re required to do the exam. By Ohio standards, prior to detracking, the vast majority of those students wouldn’t even be taking algebra. So, it was like 2 to 7% of Black students in 8th grade would pass algebra, the math, the state assessment. So that just kind of goes to show that we, we can definitively say there were students that were not even being given the opportunity to try to pass this test who clearly are able to.”

Staffing and professional development

To ensure that staff can maintain ongoing desegregation and integration initiatives, SHCSD has prioritized hiring teachers and other staff who represent historically marginalized communities. Moreover, to retain and support staff who are committed to and trained in educational equity, the district is implementing a systematic, **job-embedded professional learning structure** for all school

staff that incorporates guidance for building and maintaining desegregated and integrated classrooms. Guided by teacher feedback on the adjustments needed for teaching in detracked settings, SHCSD's Office of DEI has focused professional learning on differentiating learning abilities within the classroom by applying inquiry-based units. To deepen these skills, teams of educators engage in book studies, cross-district instructional rounds, peer-led learning walks, and teacher-leader guided one-on-one and small-group coaching. Teachers also utilize train-the-trainer approaches related to differentiating for gifted learners, an area of community concern and opportunity for improved practice. Further, SHCSD has invested in staffing instructional coaches at each school in the district. SHCSD is also implementing **equity-focused instructional rounds** that add an equity focus to existing instructional rounds. A joint collaboration between the district's Office of DEI and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, these instructional rounds convene teachers, administrators, and students in conversations around DEI. The learnings from these meetings help district leaders more rigorously analyze instructional practices in the classroom and student engagement and achievement. According to Dr. Glasner,

"[One] thing that's starting to change is that there is more ownership and ability to facilitate [these convenings] at the building level. So, when we kind of kicked these off, it was really district administrators along with potentially some consultants helping lead these equity instruction rounds, and we've really gained experience and expertise at the building level to run these on our own. ... It's usually pretty fascinating to hear the conversations that occur, both the observations that are made and the conversations that result from them. Sometimes there are some hard discussions that usually lead to some pretty fruitful conversations and good takeaways."

Instructional practices and protocols

Each of the seven schools in the district has developed and implemented a school improvement plan (SIP) that aligns with the overall strategic plan goals and objectives in the district and is tied to KPIs. SIPs support a structure of continuous learning and improvement at the granular level. Since needs vary across schools, the SIP provides implementation guidance related to the local context at each school. These plans describe curricular and extracurricular activities to ensure the inclusion of diverse student populations and perspectives in the learning experience. They also include approaches to improve engagement and participation of students of color and reduce the amount of classroom time missed. School staff on grade-level teams or subject area teams review KPIs as they make adjustments to instructional curriculum and classroom strategies. Every year, SHCSD leadership visits each school to meet with school leadership who report on SIP goals and progress made. "Data from equity educational rounds helps inform SIPs. [Moreover,] instructional coaches and IB program coordinators work with grade-level teams or subject area teams to regularly review student performance data and to make adjustments to instructional curriculum and instructional strategies," shared Dr. Glasner, offering an example of how SIPs inform teachers' use of discretionary-space in classrooms to create inclusive learning environments. He went on to say,

"This came out of some professional learning sessions that we had a couple of years ago, but the idea that there are lots of what I guess I call 'micro moments' in the course of any classroom—and, of course, over the course of a day—that could have a pretty sizable impact on students' learning experiences. It could be the way a teacher responds to a student who is raising their hand or not raising their hand. The way desks are set up in a classroom, the kinds of norms or expectations related to student collaboration and student voice in a classroom, the way students turn materials into their teacher. Those are some examples of discretionary spaces."



What Factors Support Continuous Learning and Improvement to Achieve Educational Equity at SHCSD?

Data collection and sharing mechanisms

The strategic plan details 27 specific objectives. Detailed measurements under each objective guide continuous learning and improvement. SHCSD monitors progress toward equity goals by collecting a set of robust measures identified in the strategic plan. To that end, the district has established KPIs that represent a select set of data from five main performance indicators: Early Literacy, Algebra I, Positive School Culture, Course Pathways, and Graduation Rate. Each objective in the strategic plan has a unique set of indicators and data sources, such as financial audits, academic outcomes, and school climate surveys. The district is also in the process of implementing educational equity tools to help support and monitor equity-related programming, curriculum development, and policy adoption.

The district uses **learning walks** to support staff as they implement integration-related efforts and to offer feedback based on classroom observations. In learning walks, district staff observe classrooms to assess progress on equity-related goals. District staff can talk with teachers and students to learn about their experiences and collect evidence of student performance. Importantly, these observations are followed by a collaborative debrief with teachers to prompt two-way communication and reflections that help to close equity gaps and further tailor desegregation and integration efforts.

Building-level faculty and staff also participate in **equity-focused instructional rounds**, a series of scheduled convenings where cross-sections of employees collaborate at the school level to discuss data from KPIs, identify issues, collect and share information, and propose solutions to the root-cause challenges. Many discoveries have highlighted the interplay of race and gender between adults and students, uplifting the opportunity many educators have to enhance the use of “discretionary space” in the classroom.

Finally, SHCSD engages students, parents, and teachers through an annual school culture and climate survey that collects feedback to help assess effectiveness of district programming. Specifically, the **Panorama Education Survey** collects data on students’ feelings of belonging, relationships with teachers, engagement in school, and safety. The Panorama Education Survey was adopted soon after the 2020 strategic plan. Dr. Glasner shared,

“There are data points that we collect and look at and analyze that are maybe less directly tied to integration, but certainly indirectly tied to integration. For example, attendance rates, discipline, family engagement in school events, and programming—each of these data points give us a kind of a picture or tell us a story about, how engaged are families and students in our schools? How much do they feel like they belong? How comfortable are they with people of different backgrounds? It takes multiple data points.”

—Superintendent David Glasner

“Prior to this, we had not had an external survey tool to kind of measure school climate and culture that existed in the past. ... So this really provided us with an opportunity to be more consistent [with our desegregation and integration efforts] across grade levels. It is very closely connected with the continuous [learning and] improvement process. In fact, one of our KPIs focuses specifically on data that we get from panorama. It relates to the sense of belonging that students experience in their classes, which is very closely related to detracking. One of the things we heard in tracked settings is that some students felt like they didn't belong in the classroom or in school. And we know how important it is for students to feel that sense of belonging with regards to academic achievement and social-emotional and mental well-being.”

Policy change

Establishing an educational equity policy was critical when setting up the systems, structures, processes, and requisite resources to support the development and implementation of several desegregation and integration initiatives at all levels of SHCSD. The educational equity policy was the catalyst for a systemwide change in the district's approach to equity by establishing a strategic plan centered on educational equity. The policy continues to be strengthened, revised, and refined periodically. Also, as a result of the policy, SHCSD created an Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which includes a professional learning division that builds staff capacity to implement desegregation and integration efforts. The policy change at SHCSD was supported by parallel changes within the city of Shaker Heights, which established a DEI committee and a chief diversity officer.

Implementation of the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum

To support efforts to reduce tracking among students as part of their integration work, the entire SHCSD is an IB district. SHCSD began implementing the IB curriculum in 2010, graduating its first cohort of IB diploma candidates in 2012. Due to its global focus and emphasis on creative problem-solving, hands-on projects, inquiry-based learning, and community service, the IB curriculum naturally supports progress toward educational equity. Dr. Glasner shared that the IB curriculum “really emphasizes working in teams to solve real-world problems with people who aren't necessarily similar to you and may have different demographic characteristics, using technology as a tool, and implementing inquiry-based approaches to learning.” He felt that this helped “lay the foundation for the work that we're able to do in creating inclusive and heterogeneous classrooms.”

Ongoing communication

SHCSD uses multiple pathways to support a robust communications strategy. A multilayered system of continuous learning and improvement cycles allows different voices to be heard and engaged to both provide feedback and interpret that feedback to inform change. The school district has a **weekly newsletter** that spotlights student performance, and an annual report, which includes quantitative and qualitative data, provides concrete examples of what integration-related work looks like in practice for students. As Dr. Glasner explains, “because people often don't know [what inclusive and heterogeneous classrooms mean] ... being prepared to communicate and explain and show stakeholders what this looks like is important.” Regular communication with faculty, staff, and parents helps include them in the district's continuous learning and improvement strategies, and it also helps to generate buy-in as families feel more invested in SHCSD's educational equity strategies. In-person interactions with parents, teachers, and students are crucial for implementation and productive for problem solving, especially as participants voice their concerns or disagreements. As Dr. Glasner reported,

“We moved to eliminate tracking in our classes in the summer of 2020, and some of the loudest voices I heard, they talked about how much they value diversity, but how much they struggled with the idea that we are eliminating tracking in our schools. And now, just a couple days ago I was talking to community members who think that eliminating tracking and moving to heterogeneous classrooms is the best thing we could've done.”

SHCSD solicits input from students, parents, and individual school staff and teachers and takes any expressed concerns seriously. For example, since the district has shifted away from academic tracking, many parents have asked how their child’s learning will be supported—a concern that is especially relevant for parents with children whose achievement level is at either end of the spectrum. This concern among parents led to an increased focus on teacher training to better provide for students of all achievement levels in one classroom. In addition to responding to parent concerns, students have historically shared their experiences with tracking—both negative and positive—at school board meetings, which provided data and information for the district to adjust school policy as needed. Feedback has helped the district ensure that teachers are equipped with the resources to support the students and families in their schools.

Key partnerships and equity-focused collaboration

Key partnerships with the Multicultural Students’ Achievement Network (MSAN) and external consultants support SHCSD in its equity-related goals. MSAN is a national coalition of multiracial school districts that work together toward the goal of improving access, opportunity, and achievement for students of color. As a founding member of MSAN, SHCSD partners with other school districts around the country with demographics that are similar to those of Shaker Heights. MSAN member districts are not just similar in demographic patterns but are also doing similar equity-related work. The Network includes districts that are at different stages in their journey to detrack school curriculum. Members meet regularly over the course of the year, both virtually and in person, to learn from each other at all levels of the organization. Members and participants include students, teachers, and administrators, among other roles. In addition, SHCSD works with third-party consultants who provide technical assistance in implementing district desegregation and integration initiatives, especially related to the professional development of staff and leadership, and in facilitating meetings, such as the equity-focused instructional rounds.

SHCSD creates opportunities for industry partners to visit schools and talk to students to learn about their educational needs. SHCSD recently joined the Greater Cleveland Career Consortium, where industry and school partners work together. The consortium creates space for information sharing and shared decision making. For instance, 3 years ago, after visiting local industry leaders and companies to identify the skills they value among graduates, SHCSD adjusted their high school curriculum by adding technical education pathways focused on robotics and advanced manufacturing. SHCSD also has a subsidiary called the Shaker Schools Foundation that serves as a point entity for engagement with local and regional partners and helps develop those relationships.



What Are the Challenges to Continuous Learning and Improvement Efforts?

As SHCSD makes progress on strategic goals toward educational equity, the district is working to anticipate and address challenges to continued progress, including managing unintended consequences of policy changes, maintaining buy-in amid a complex range of community perspectives, and sustaining staffing for the level of efforts needed to implement strategic goals.

Unintended consequences of policy changes: Open enrollment

Twenty years ago, SHCHD implemented an open enrollment policy enabling students to enroll in the grade level or honors section of a class without a prerequisite. SHCSD implemented open enrollment with the intention of having more racial and socioeconomic diversity in classrooms as a result of increased access. The impact of the policy, however, was the opposite: “More white students and families took advantage of that policy, so we ended up having greater disparities in enrollment following that policy, rather than reducing disparities in enrollment,” said Dr. Glasner. These experiences encouraged the adoption of detracking in the district. Glasner went on to say,

“Most importantly, we ended up deciding that there was no good way to try to bring more students of color into an inherently flawed system. We did experiment with other different schools in the district, experimented with different strategies—having more advanced classes, having less advanced classes, broadening the criteria to just try to capture more students of color from the outset, instead of requiring or having them come ask to be included in the class, sending out different notifications, so that families kind of preemptively knew about this policy.”

While the open enrollment policy is theoretically still intact, it is moot. At the high school, there continue to be course levels and course pathways, but after detracking, these are much less needed.

Maintaining community buy-in

Community members bring varied perspectives and reactions to proposed changes, which means SHCSD leadership consistently has to engage and communicate with parents, students, teachers, and school staff to ensure shared understanding and commitment toward educational equity. It is also challenging to help audiences reimagine what education could look like in a heterogenous, integrated, and rigorous space, since few have that frame of reference from past experiences. Much of the communication requires helping people picture something they have not yet experienced, which is a common challenge when making systemic changes. Parents say they do not know what the classroom looks like and how students are learning, and leadership is investing in time and spaces to improve parent understanding of how the district is creating integrated spaces while also providing individualized supports, challenges, and enrichment for all students.

“There are community members that are fierce proponents of doing everything we can to support and facilitate integration and excellence in our school district, and there are some members of the community who think we’re not doing enough yet. I think there are also members of the community who are resistant to change, who push back quite a bit on any of the efforts. There isn’t one actor that I can say is definitely anti- all the things we do, and there isn’t one actor that I’d say is definitely for. It’s more complex than that.”

—Superintendent David Glasner

Change management and staffing challenges

Implementing the strategic goals is part of a longer term systemic change, beyond the 5-year strategic plan. Part of the challenge is ensuring the students benefit from the changes being implemented, while staying the course to make school integration internalized and systematic. Dr. Glasner explains,

“Systemic change takes a long time to implement. So, I think time is an ongoing challenge. I don't just mean time to focus on the work, I also mean time to let the work have an impact. I think also, school districts are unique in that our goal is to impact student learning now. It's urgent. For every student who is in our school district, they're here now. Integration matters to them now. And we recognize that some of the work we're doing takes 5 to 10 years to really start becoming internalized, start becoming more systematized. So that has also been a challenge.”

As part of this change management, SHCSD continues to invest in professional development of teachers and staff and to recruit and retain a diverse workforce, especially from demographic groups that are underrepresented across racial and ethnic groups.



Lessons Learned

- **Make a long-term commitment.** Recognize the path to educational equity is a long journey that will take many years of investment before results are tangible.
- **Invest in staff professional development to create a community of practitioners.** Such a community can support district leaders as they learn from other people doing equity-related work or who will be impacted by this work.
- **Move the work forward while promoting and developing readiness.** Moving the dial on educational equity can benefit from implementing many parallel efforts happening together.
- **Capture continuous feedback using data from multiple sources.** Ensure that district decision makers continue to get feedback via a variety of different mechanisms. This can include school culture and climate surveys and student achievement data. It should also include talking with and listening to students, families, and teachers and having district leaders observe the learning and teaching that happen in classrooms.
- **Re-examine practices at every level, including curriculum and instruction.** For SHCSD, continuous learning and improvement practices were especially important after implementing key changes, such as detracking. SHCSD continues to put in place intentional structures, such as regular alignment meetings and collaborative planning time, so that curriculum and instruction can be regularly examined and revised.

“It's always tempting to say things like, ‘We're not ready yet. Our teachers aren't ready, or our community members aren't ready, or our students aren't ready for whatever change we're trying to do.’ And if we never do it, no one will ever get ready. So it is a little bit of a balance, but I think you have to be willing to just try things out, do things, move things forward. Otherwise, we'll always be stuck in a place of trying to get ready for a future that doesn't exist.”

—Superintendent David Glasner