



Press Release

Long Island Strong Schools Alliance releases *Including Every Child*, an assessment of DEI policies and practices in Long Island public schools.

Half of Long Island school districts have made little or no progress in implementing the state's policy on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Long Island, NY – August 30, 2023 – Today, the Long Island Strong Schools Alliance (LISSA) releases its report examining the extent to which Long Island's school districts have moved to adopt the New York State Department of Education's (NYSED) policy requirements on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), enacted in 2021. The report, *Including Every Child: A Report on the State of DEI Efforts in Long Island Public Schools*, finds that just under half of districts have made significant progress in implementing the state policy, with similar percentages in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Larger districts and those with more students of color are more likely to have made headway.

In 2021, New York State's Board of Regents instituted a [policy](#) on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within K-12 school curriculum, culture and hiring practices. This policy follows an increasing body of research demonstrating that DEI initiatives are beneficial to student learning and preparation for the workforce. Recently, Attorney General Letitia James and New York State Education Department (NYSED) Commissioner Betty A. Rosa released [guidance](#) reminding districts of their obligations under the NYSED policy. Yet the state does not have a system in place to measure compliance or to hold districts accountable if they do not follow the policy.

Using publicly available information, freedom of information requests, and interviews with administrators and other stakeholders, LISSA has gathered data on districts' current efforts in DEI. The data reveal that some districts have embarked on comprehensive DEI initiatives, while the majority of districts have done the bare minimum, and some districts apparently have not yet begun to address the policy. In addition, there are demographic differences in adoption rates among school districts, with smaller districts less likely to have taken action to implement appropriate DEI policies.

The LISSA report includes recommendations regarding what stakeholders (administrators, school board members and community members) can do to make their school district a better place to learn, work and thrive. "We would like to see all Long Island school districts embrace the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiative passed down by NYSED and the NYS Board of Regents in 2021," **LISSA President Amanda Cohen-Stein** said, "By adopting policies that promote DEI, a district ensures that students from various backgrounds feel valued and represented, while also equipping students with the crucial skills of empathy, cultural awareness, open-mindedness, and a sense of belonging that will help them thrive in an interconnected global society. These are not simply values to uphold but are the essential elements that build strong communities."

"DEI efforts include practices, programs, initiatives, and curriculum that benefit every single student and community. They are long standing practices, with tangible benefits for everyone," said **LISSA Vice President Aisha Wilson-Carter**. "I had the benefit of growing up in a very diverse district on Long Island, where we all belonged to one community, but our differences were acknowledged and valued. It's hard to imagine that my own kids are not having the same experience." Dr. Wilson-Carter continued, "The NY state policy is one step to make sure every child receives the education they deserve and need to prepare them for the future, regardless of what they decide to do after graduation. We hope that this report moves the conversation forward, provides accountability, and cuts through the noise and pushback against diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging."

The report finds that, of the 125 public school districts on Long Island, roughly half embed DEI initiatives into their hiring practices, with similar percentages attempting to address DEI in school culture, student curriculum and professional development. In comparison, only 32% have DEI information accessible on their district website, only 29% have a DEI committee that is both active and inclusive of all stakeholders, and only 23% have conducted a DEI climate survey within the last two academic years.

Based on overall response to the policy, each district was assigned a rating of Poor, Fair, Satisfactory, or Exemplary. More than 18% of districts are rated Poor, with no discernible work to show on improving DEI, while one third of districts have earned a rating of Fair, with limited effort to address DEI in the areas examined. The largest group of school districts (40%) earned a Satisfactory rating, indicating efforts across many areas to address the state policy, while 7% earned an Exemplary rating,

indicating a strong commitment to improving the curriculum, hiring, and culture of their schools in a transparent way that involves all stakeholders.

The research reveals the following disparities among districts:

- Districts with more students are much more likely to have active DEI programs. Among districts with fewer than 500 students, almost half are in the Poor category, while more than half of districts with over 3000 students earned a Satisfactory or Exemplary rating.
- Districts with more racially diverse student populations are much more likely to have active DEI programs than those with student bodies that are predominantly white. Among the school districts with fewer than 30% students of color, almost two thirds rate as Poor or Fair in their DEI efforts. Among the districts with the greatest populations of students of color, more than 14% earn an Exemplary rating, and fewer than 4% score as Poor.
- Comparing districts by median income, the picture is more mixed. The wealthiest districts have the smallest percentage that are rated Poor, but also no districts rated as Exemplary. However, among the districts with the lowest median income, more than 23% are rated as Poor, yet more than 11% are rated as Exemplary. These differences likely reflect differences in the racial demographics of the districts, as well as differences in resources available.

LISSA is a nonprofit organization founded in June, 2021, whose mission is to support policies that strengthen education in our public schools, with a focus on critical thinking skills, civic engagement, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. LISSA provides resources, organizational help, and information to parents, teachers, students, and community members. LISSA is committed to advocating for an equitable and quality education for Long Island students. Additional information on LISSA is available at www.strongschoolsli.org.