

BALTIMORE SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



March 25,
2020

Summary of 2019-2020 Equity Work

The following report contains a summation of equity work undertaken by Baltimore School for the Arts in response to a comprehensive Equity Audit conducted in the Spring of 2019.

Baltimore School for the Arts: Executive Summary

SUMMARY OF 2019-2020 EQUITY WORK

BACKGROUND

In the Spring of 2019, Baltimore School for the Arts (BSA) voluntarily participated in an Equity Audit that was designed to provide a framework for BSA to answer three essential questions:

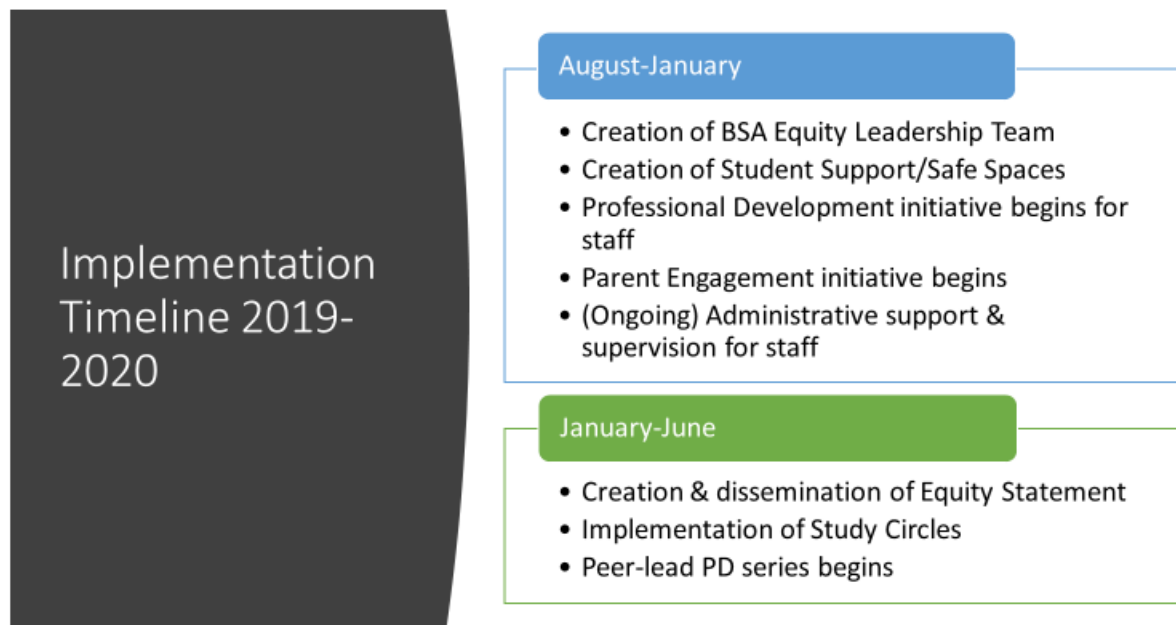
1. Where are we as a school?
2. Where do we want to go as a school?
3. What challenges do we face in meeting these goals?
4. How do we address these challenges?

Multiple experiences and perspectives were collected from members of the student, staff, administration, and family community to provide insight into these questions. Data was also analyzed to provide an opportunity for a comparative quantitative analysis. A major strength on which to build upon as BSA positions itself on the forefront of equitable teaching and instruction, especially within the performing arts community, is BSA's mission, academic outcomes, performing arts exposure, and commitment to 'art changing lives' of all students. Understanding that BSA literally gives students from all walks of life the opportunity to develop their skills and talents under the guidance of professionals is something to continuously celebrate. However, this opportunity did not erase BSA data which reflected predictable disparities in relation to discipline procedures and policies, college acceptance rates, and standardized test scores.

BSA's Equity Audit contained the following seven detailed recommendations for implementation:

- Creation of a BSA Equity Leadership Team
- Agency-Wide Professional Development & Parent Engagement Series
- Increased Communication, Both Vertically and Horizontally
- Explicitly Stated Equitable Disciplinary Practices and Implementation of Accountability Plan for Staff
- Creation of Safe Spaces for Students/Student Social-Emotional Support
- Increased Cultural Representation from both a Curriculum and Personnel Aspect Increased Support for Students Entering from Lower Performing Schools

A timeline was also presented for implementation of the recommendations and is presented in Table 1 below:



The following contains an update on the progress of each of the seven listed recommendations.

BSA Recommendations

BSA Recommendation 1: Creation of a BSA Equity Leadership Team

Update: BSA created a volunteer Equity Leadership Team which met a total of three times. At the initial meeting in November, the team identified three priority areas which are:

1. Creation of a BSA Equity Statement
2. Review/Accountability of BSA disciplinary procedures, especially with students of color
3. Improved communication among BSA school, especially among full and part-time staff

At the last meeting on February 20, 2020, the Equity Leadership Team expressed a plan of surveying staff to include at least one from each Department, including academic, to gain a sense of how the professional development workshops have been implemented. Areas of focus include increased understanding of social-emotional learning, communication between administration and staff; what staff need in order to sustain equity work, and how to begin digging deeper into Restorative Practices or other topics/themes. This survey is slated to be given to staff at the last PD session.

Next Steps: It is recommended that the BSA Equity Leadership Team continue to meet and increase meetings to a monthly or bi-monthly basis for the 2020-2021 school year, with the focus being on supporting the creation of an Equity Statement, and including necessary stakeholders in its development (e.g., fellow colleagues, students, and families).

BSA Recommendation 2: Agency-Wide Professional Development & Parent Engagement Series

Update: BSA began a professional development series in August 2019, with the focus being on Equity from a Social-Emotional lens. BSA has held a total of four (4) sessions on Equity, including one on an introduction into Restorative Practices as an equitable response to relationship building and discipline. Staff evaluations reflect that the majority of staff believe that all PD sessions met their respective objectives, and have the desire to implement the recommendations into both their interactions with and advocacy efforts for students. The final PD session is scheduled for May 2020, with the focus being a review of concepts and having participants identify tangible next steps to include in their teachings and interactions with students and fellow staff.

Next Steps: It is recommended that PD sessions continue into the 2020-2021 school year on a quarterly basis, with the goal being that staff begin to support each other in implementing equity and inclusive principles and language.

BSA Recommendation 3: Increased Communication, Both Vertically and Horizontally

Update: In February 2020, Sage Wellness Group facilitated a meeting between BSA and its community partner, OrchKids to identify ways to improve communication between the two organizations, specifically as it relates to shared students. It was decided that parents of students enrolled in both BSA and OrchKids would be asked to sign a Release of Information allowing both agencies to share academic progress, concerns, and ways to support students. Regarding internal communication within BSA, internal communication strategies were discussed within the Equity Leadership team meetings, with the goal being to include effective communication strategies on the last PD session.

Next Steps: It is recommended that OrchKids and BSA communicate quarterly to identify students in need of extra social-emotional and academic support. It is also recommended that communication strategies be developed that include part-time staff, who may not be able to attend the scheduled PD sessions, so that they can remain informed of inclusive techniques, and strengths-based language.

BSA Recommendation 4: Explicitly Stated Equitable Disciplinary Practices and Implementation of Accountability Plan for Staff

Update: Sage Wellness Founder and BSA Principal have engaged in conversations around disciplinary strategies. Disciplinary strategies have been included for discussion in PD sessions, specifically the Restorative Justice PD session, which included strategies for relationship building as well as techniques to engage in restorative conversations.

Next Steps: It is recommended that follow-up PD sessions include more specific strategies on Restorative Practices, and that Restorative tenants are included in an explicitly stated disciplinary practice, which includes a staff accountability plan.

BSA Recommendation 5: Creation of Safe Spaces for Students/Student Social-Emotional Support

Update: The need for safe spaces for students has been addressed in both staff PD and also BSA administrative meetings.

Next Steps: Including student voice in this discussion is recommended. Follow up surveys, focus groups, and Study Circle sessions would allow for students to share their experiences and continue to express needs around what safety looks and feels like for them.

BSA Recommendation 6: Increased Cultural Representation from both a Curriculum and Personnel Aspect

Update: This recommendation was not addressed during the BSA's work with Sage Wellness Group, however, BSA administration detailed various ways that BSA staff have begun to address this recommendation internally.

Next Steps: It is recommended that increased cultural representation continue to be emphasized from an academic and performance arts perspective, and that the inclusion of the Hidden Curriculum be discussed at all staff levels, as it relates to equity and inclusion.

BSA Recommendation 7: Increased Support for Students Entering from Lower Performing Schools

Update: Ways to provide increased support for students entering from lower performing schools was discussed throughout the school year at a staff, administrative, and Equity Leadership Team level. One of the initiatives taken internally by BSA staff was the assignment of a teacher mentor to students. Sage Wellness Group did not provide oversight for this mentorship program and cannot provide an accurate update.

Next Steps: It is recommended that parent voice be included (if not already) in efforts to provide increased support to students entering BSA from lower performing schools. Student voice can be used to assess the effectiveness of the mentorship program and note successes and challenges associated with their respective assimilation processes. One of the strengths noted by many students during student process groups was the support received by other students. Having students serve as student mentors is another possibility that can be explored.

Conclusion

During the 2019-2020 BSA school year, BSA began implementing recommendations from their Equity Audit. The above report highlights initiatives undertaken and identifies next steps for the 2020-2021 school year.