



# Student Voice for Student Change

Whitney Davis—Winter 2011

University of Oregon, ELDL 655



## BIG HAIRY AUDACIOUS GOAL:

**GOAL:** To promote cultural competency by enhancing and expanding the role that the Student Advisory Group (SAG) plays within the District's decision making process. This will be achieved by creating recommendations centered on meeting the needs of each and every student to support the district's vision of *Every Student a Graduate Prepared for a Bright and Successful Future*. The group will increase its impact at each high school by developing and implementing projects designed to address issues of equity and diversity.

**WHY?** Building cultural competency is a district initiative; cultural competent schools maximize student achievement regardless of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, sexual orientation, and learning differences. Schools have a transcendent responsibility to be a supportive and inviting place for **all** students to learn. School culture should embody a climate that is representative of all students. The district has ~11,000 students and 25% identify as non-white. Cultural competency leads to more effective teaching, equips the community to reach out to students' families, addresses student achievement gaps, reinforces American ideals, and helps meet accountability requirements. (NEA, 2008).

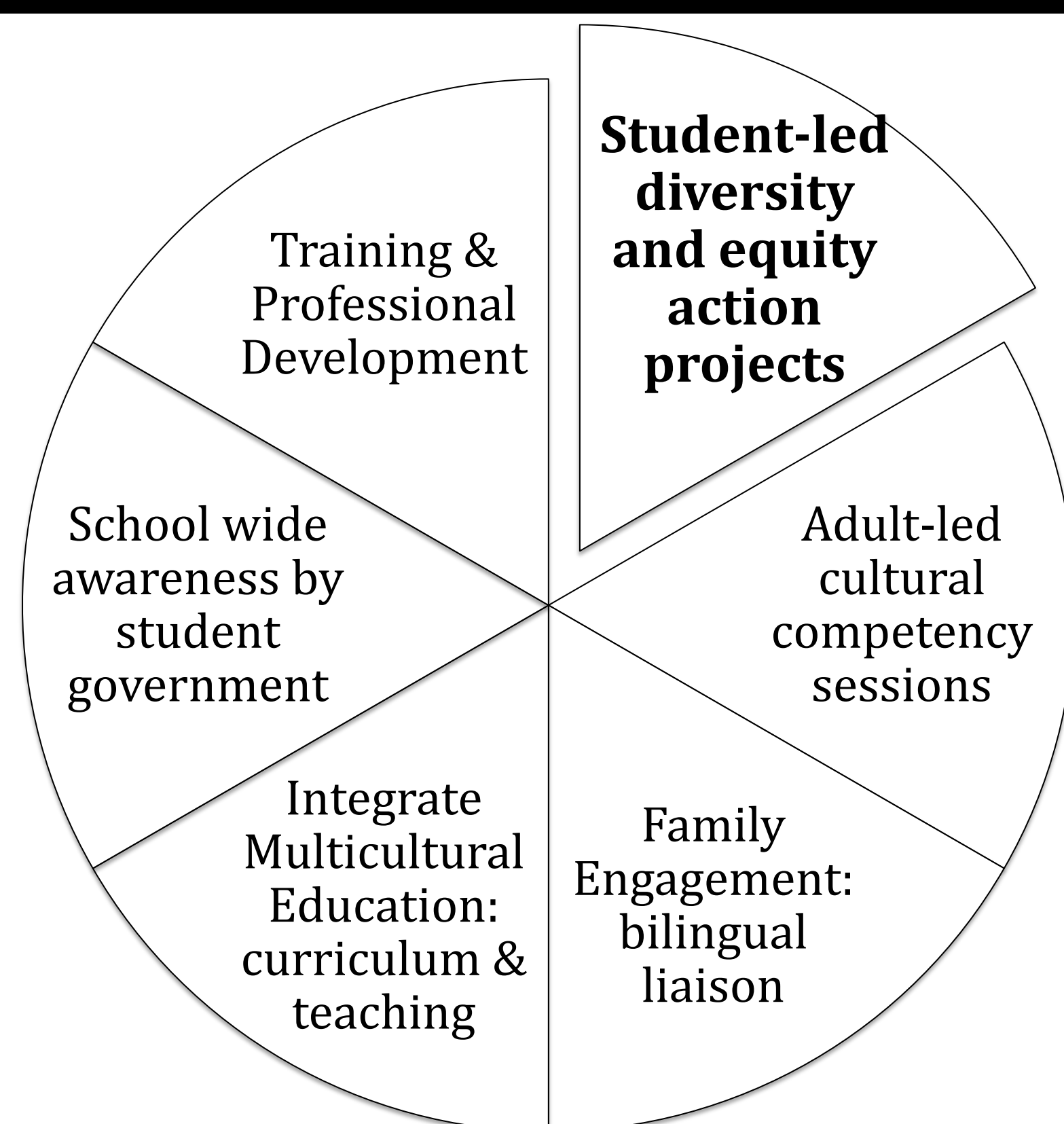
**EVIDENCE OF DISTRICT NEED:** The 2010 district survey assessed 521 staff perceptions about key school climate factors and current practices that influence teaching and learning environment with respect to diversity, equity, and the achievement gap.

- Respondents indicated that there was limited participation and access for diverse families' involvement and observed that students' culture and experiences were not included in the classroom settings.
- Respondents communicated a desire to move from philosophy to implementation of culturally competent strategies at all grades.

*"This district has a long way to go in regards to treating all students equally. We talk out the sides of our mouths when it comes to race and diversity."* –District Staff

*"There is clearly a cultural and socio-economic divide between the two major high schools in the district."* –District Staff

## OPTIONS FOR GOAL ACHIEVEMENT:



## REFERENCES:

Christensen, L. (2001). *For my people. Rethinking Schools, 15(4)*. Retrieved from: <http://www.rethinkingschools.org/ProdDetails.asp?ID=RTSV0115N4&d=etoc>

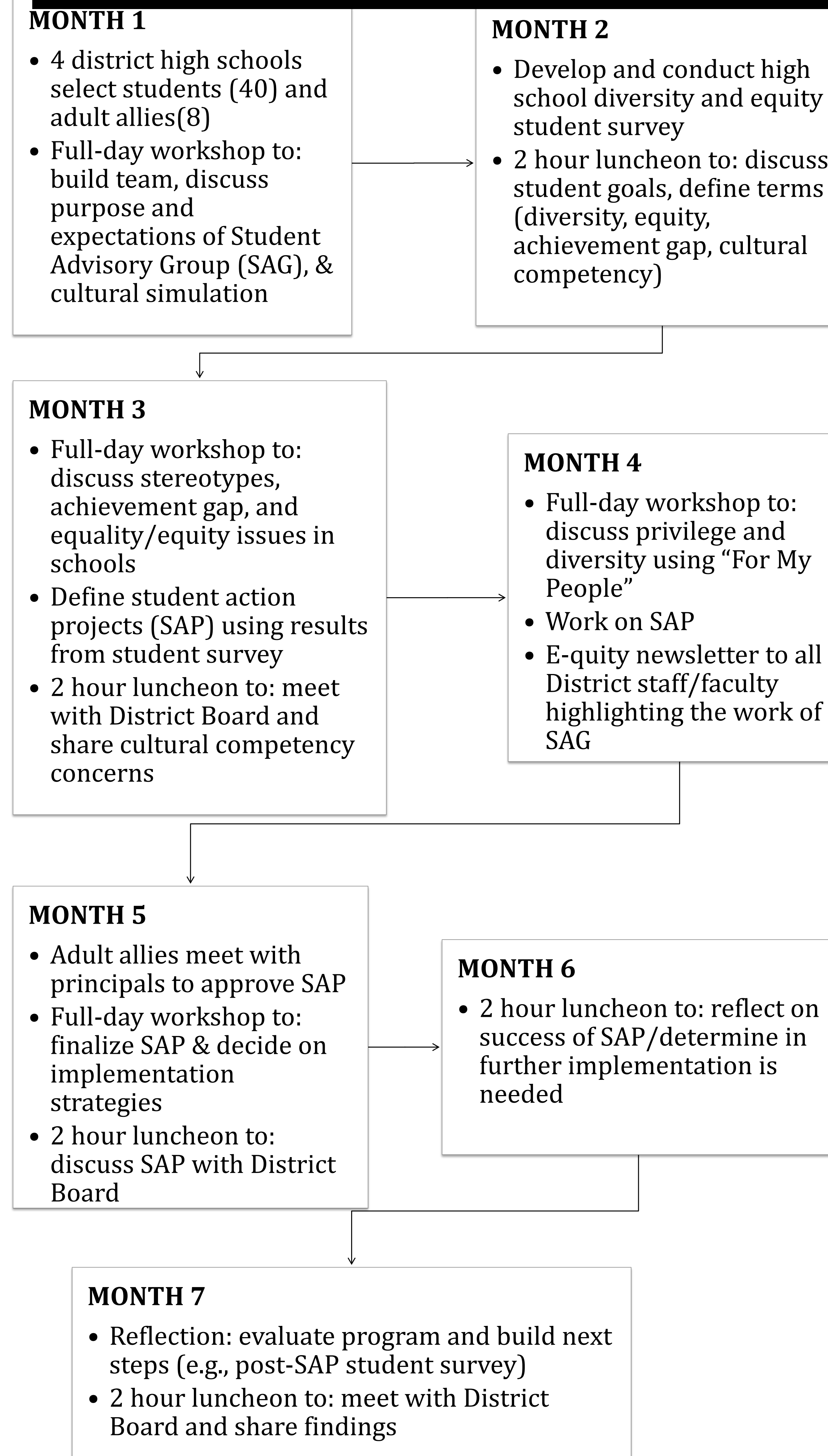
Lenssen, J., & Metzoff, N. (2000). Enhancing Cultural Competency Through Simulation Activities. *Multicultural Perspectives 2 (1)*, 29-34.

McIntosh, P. (1988). *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. National Education Association. (2008). Promoting educators' cultural competence to better serve culturally diverse students. Retrieved from [http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/mf\\_P813\\_CulturalCompetence.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/mf_P813_CulturalCompetence.pdf)

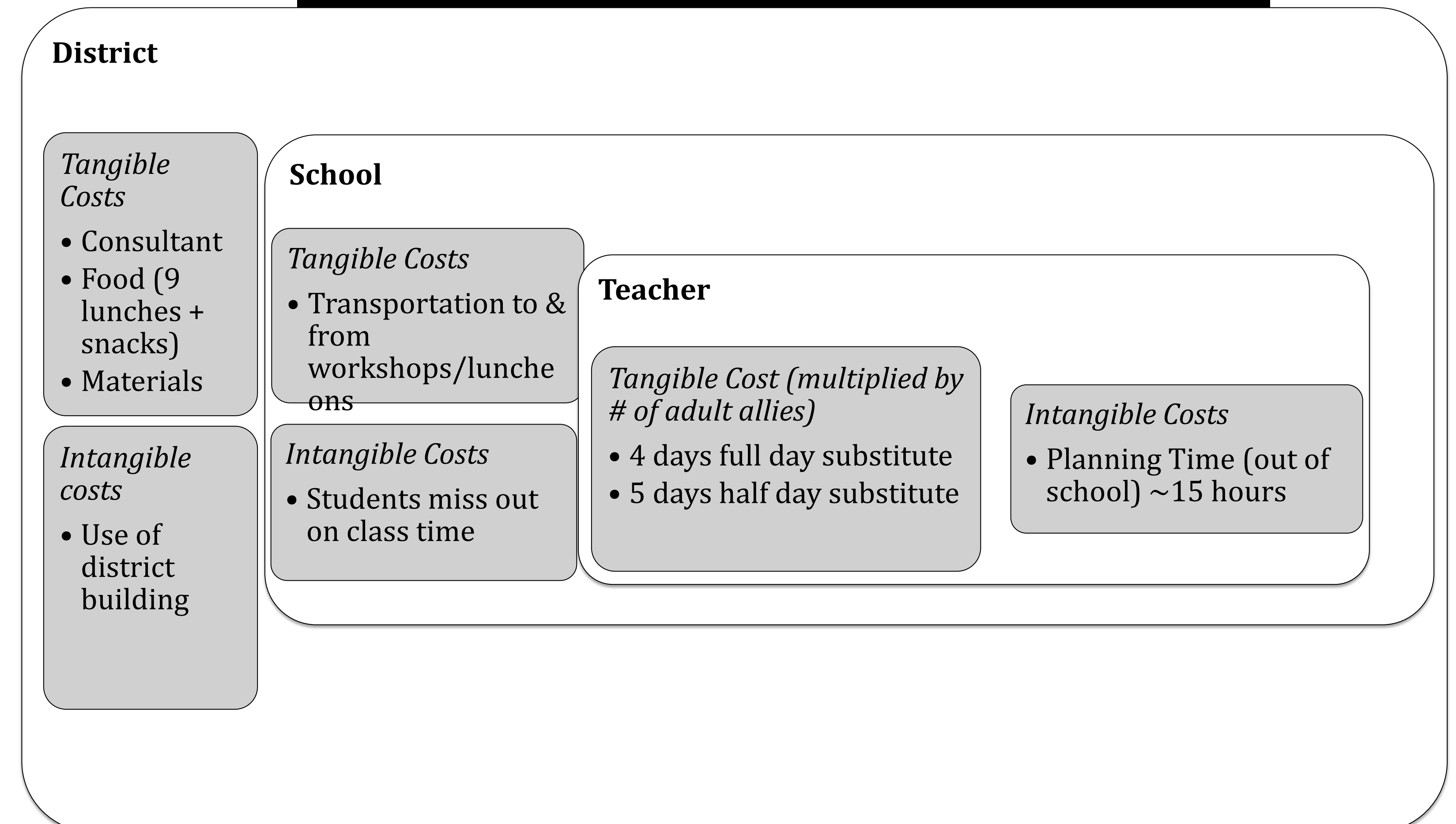
Patterson, K., Greeny, J., McMillan, B., & Swisher, J. (2002). *Critical conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Springfield Public Schools. (2010). *Building cultural competency assessment (Data file)*.

## IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE:



## RESOURCE IMPACTS:



## PROJECTIONS:

### HIGH LEVEL INPUTS:

- 4 full day workshops, 5 luncheons
- Cultural simulation activity
- High school student diversity and equity survey
- Curriculum includes, but not limited to: *For My People, Crucial Conversations, Use Another Word, Unpacking Privilege*

### OUTCOMES:

- Implementation of student-created and led programs promote respect for diversity and equity at each high school.
- Stronger awareness of diversity and equity issues in the schools on the district, school, classroom, and student level.
- Students armed with developed and enhanced leadership skills; prepared with tools for crucial conversations and language for dealing with discrimination.
- Teachers are more effective and academic gains help to fight the achievement gap.

### SUCCESS CRITERIA:

- Enhanced student communication with the District Board to create improved understanding of the issues and needs of all students.
- Deepened connections among students from all four of the district high schools through team building and workshops.
- District staff inspired, informed by the ideas and experiences of the participating students.
- Greater cultural respect in the District's community, as well as a greater connection between the district's high schools and the community.
- Working towards a culturally competent school district.
- Student diversity and equity study demonstrate that student action plans improved practices and school culture to be inviting and safe for **all** students.

## JUSTIFICATION & RATIONALE:

Student-led action projects (SAP) were chosen as a means of achieving cultural competency in the District. By empowering the students to be leaders, it demonstrates their value and inevitably assures their voices will be heard. It helps to affirm **all** students right to a place in the school and teaches them to "talk back" to untrue stereotypes in their community (Christensen, 2001).

1) This directive will minimize ethnic polarization, which is cultural isolation, an atmosphere of intolerance, stereotyping, violence and harassments, inaccurate judgments, etc. (Metzoff and Lenssen, 2000).

Metzoff and Lenssen claim ethnic polarization limits a students ability to become (2000):

- Community members
- Self-actualized individuals
- Lifelong learners
- Creative thinkers and problem solvers.

2) This initiative provides opportunity and access to all students including those from under-served populations to participate in rigorous school culture redesign, add relevance and diverse perspectives to educational activities on a regular basis, and will help teachers/staff to understand the neighborhood that their students live in.

3) This strategy opens up communication between the 4 high schools in the district to break down stereotypes and build a bridge between students. Creates inviting and inclusive practices so students feel safe to construct the culture at their school.

4) The use of simulations "allow participants to be themselves in a recreated situation and gives students the opportunity to practice decision-making and problem-solving techniques with guidance from a facilitator. The experience is shared and gives the participants a common frame of reference for discussion and analysis" (Metzoff and Lenssen, 2000).