



## PPS Racial Equity and Social Justice Lens

*Updated April 2021*

Portland Public Schools is committed to academic excellence and personal success for all students. Central to this commitment is the support of racial equity and social justice. Dedicated policy, people, and practice are necessary to create a culturally responsive organization that ensures the success of students who can navigate and compete in a culturally complex society and global economy. It is through racial equity and social justice that PPS will become a premier school district.

In May 2019, PPS adopted our community-informed Vision, [Portland Public Schools reImagined](#).. Portland Public Schools is committed to preparing our students to lead change and improve the world for the district we aim to become by 2030. Our community defined our:

- **Vision:** A picture of what we want for our students. The Vision includes the Graduate Portrait, Educator Essentials, Educational System Shifts, and Core Values.
- **Core Values:** The district's enduring beliefs that will guide our action toward our collective Vision.
- **Graduate Portrait:** A clear and ambitious description of what the community wants our students to know, be, and be able to do, in order to prepare them to thrive in their lives and careers.
- **Educator Essentials:** The knowledge, skills, mindsets, and dispositions needed from adults to support the Graduate Portrait.
- **System Shifts:** Changes to the district's priorities and operations that will help create the conditions required to reach our Vision.



With a community-informed Vision established, we are developing a multi-year **strategic plan** that guides our decisions and investments to realize the Vision for our graduates and the larger learning ecosystem.

In order to advance toward the Vision and achieve the 3-year Board Goals, PPS examined its current state to develop a **theory of action** for change to identify key priorities.

We utilize this theory of action to provide focus and to center our decision making on the experiences of students of color. Our Theory of Action explicitly calls out the pernicious institutional and cultural racism embedded in our system and prompts us to take action that disrupts the barriers that hinder us from reaching our goals.

**PPS Strategic Plan Theory of Action:**

If... We braid Racial Equity and Social Justice strategies into our instructional core, work with our students, teachers, and content, and build our organizational culture and capacity to create a strong foundation to support every student...

Then... We will reimagine Portland Public Schools to ensure every student, especially our Black and Native American students who experience the greatest barriers, realize the Vision of the Graduate Portrait.

In 2011, PPS adopted a Racial Educational Equity Policy that called out harmful disparities in our schools and identified the district's role in eliminating them. Our aim is to elevate PPS Racial Equity and Social Justice practices to a comprehensive, defined framework with clear system-wide equity and social justice actions and measurable results.

We believe in the fundamental right to human dignity and that generating an equitable world requires an educational system that intentionally disrupts - and builds leaders to disrupt - systems of oppression. Building on the commitment and successes of over 10 years since the Racial Educational Equity Policy launched, PPS is deeply engaged in and fundamentally accelerating and centering our RESJ work, constantly examining opportunities to increase RESJ strategies through organizational transformation and system-wide collaboration. By way of this central focus and in partnership with stakeholders, including and especially those representing students of color, we will bring to an end racial predictability and disproportionality.

At PPS, we utilize the approach of Targeted Universalism because we recognize that resource conversations can be polarizing and that discourse can become trapped in either/or, zero-sum mindsets. Our approach aims to operationalize our RESJ values so that every student is served so our universal board goals are achieved and the graduate profile of our Vision. Our approach supports the distinct needs of students of color while also acknowledging our mutual interdependence. The primary focus of the Racial Equity and Social Justice lens is on race and ethnicity. While there continues to be a deep commitment to many other areas of the opportunity gap, we know that a focus on race by everyone at PPS allows direct improvements in the other dimensions of diversity. We also know that race and ethnicity continue to compound disparity. We are committed to explicitly identifying disparities in education outcomes for the purpose of targeting areas for action, intervention and investment



## **Beliefs**

**We believe** the district should adopt a student-centered, racial equity and social justice focused lens in all decisions.

**We believe** all students should have equitable access to enriched opportunities in school.

**We believe** we have a collective responsibility to ensure our schools provide a caring, supportive environment. School communities should support healthy, positive development of students and help them grow their unique gifts and talents.

**We believe** the district must work in aligned and coherent ways and in close partnerships with families and communities. We believe that communities, parents, teachers, and community-based organizations have unique and important solutions to improving outcomes for our students and educational systems. Our work will only be successful if we are able to truly partner with the community, engage with respect, authentically listen -- and have the courage to share decision making, control, and resources.

**We believe** that we are uniquely positioned to effect change broadly across our community because of our role in educating and caring for close to 50,000 Portland children every day. We believe in being courageous and bringing a sense of urgency to this important work.

**We believe** in setting measurable and audacious goals. Embedded in each goal is the provision of a culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, with clearly defined racial equity and social justice based practices and curriculums.

**We believe** in accountability in all areas of school and student performance, including the areas of Racial Equity and Social Justice

**We believe** that speaking a language other than English is an asset and that our education system must celebrate and enhance this ability alongside appropriate and culturally responsive support for English as a second language.

**We believe** students receiving special education services are an integral part of our educational responsibility and we must welcome the opportunity to be inclusive, make appropriate accommodations, and celebrate their assets. We must directly address the over-representation of children of color in special education and the under-representation in “talented and gifted.”

3



## **Racial Equity and Social Justice Lens**

The PPS RESJ Lens is a critical thinking tool which will be applied to the internal systems, processes, resources and programs of PPS to create increased opportunities for all students by evaluating burdens, benefits and outcomes to underserved communities. Through consistent utilization of the RESJ Lens, we intend to strengthen our strategies and approaches toward more equitable outcomes for every student.

**PPS Staff use this link to fill out and document your reflections: [PPS RESJ LENS FORM](#)**

The following questions are a guide and will be considered when making decisions and contemplating our strategies.

1. Describe the proposed action, desired results and outcomes, and connection to PPS' Vision: A graduate of Portland Public Schools will be a compassionate, critical thinker, able to collaborate and solve problems, and be prepared to lead a more socially just world. Surface any assumptions.
2. How have you intentionally involved external stakeholders who are also members of the communities affected by this policy, program, practice or decision?
  - a. Is there stakeholder support or opposition to the proposal? Why?
3. How does the proposed action expand opportunities for racial equity and social justice?
  - a. How are Black and Native student groups affected?
  - b. How will Black and Native students experience a greater sense of belonging?
  - c. Are there any potential unintended consequences for other specific groups/populations? Are there strategies in place to mitigate any negative impacts?
4. How does the proposed action disrupt barriers to equitable outcome?
  - a. What element of systemic racism or cultural narrative is being disrupted?

5. What information/data are you basing your decision or action upon?  
a. What data did you use to establish the need for the proposed action? b. What data or metrics will you collect/use to track impacts of the proposed action on the identified populations (baseline and moving forward).

6. Describe any changes you have made or will make to the action after applying this lens 4



### Data Driven Prompts

## RESJ Dashboard

Please utilize this dashboard to inform your reflections and decision making.

#### A. Student and Staff Demographics

How does the proposed action close the disparity between student and teacher diversity?

#### B. Student Math and ELA Achievement

How does the proposed action create opportunities to increase student achievement in Math and ELA for Black and Native students?

#### C. Student Math and ELA Growth

How does the proposed action create opportunities for catalytic growth in Math and ELA for Black and Native students?

#### D. Disproportionate Discipline

How does the proposed action disrupt predictable racial patterns in discipline for Pacific Islander, Black and Native students?

#### E. High School Graduation

How does the proposed action create greater opportunities for high school graduation for Native students?



## Definitions

Diversity- Any and all differences between and among people.

Educational Equity - Educational equity means raising the achievement of all students while (1) narrowing the gaps between the lowest and highest performing students and (2) eliminating the racial predictability and disproportionality of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories. (from the PPS Racial Equity Policy narrative)

Equity - The state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial and fair. The concept of equity is synonymous with fairness and justice. It is helpful to think of equity as not simply a desired state or lofty value. To be achieved and sustained, equity needs to be thought of as a structural and system concept.

Inclusion - Inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging.

Social Justice - Elimination of performance variability between student groups and accelerated achievement for underserved populations.

Targeted Universalism: means setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals. Within a targeted universalism framework, universal goals are established for all groups concerned. The strategies developed to achieve those goals are targeted, based upon how different groups are situated within structures, culture, and across geographies to obtain the universal goal. Targeted universalism is goal oriented, and the processes are directed in service of the explicit, universal goal.

*powell, john, Stephen Menendian and Wendy Ake, "Targeted universalism: Policy & Practice." Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, University of California, Berkeley, 2019. [haas.institute.berkeley.edu/targeteduniversalism](http://haas.institute.berkeley.edu/targeteduniversalism).*

