



Portland Public Schools Racial Equity Plan



WHY RACIAL EQUITY?

PPS Racial Educational Equity Policy

On June 13, 2011 the Portland School Board unanimously approved the Portland Public Schools Racial Educational Equity Policy (2.10.010-P). The policy calls out race-based disparities in schools, identifies the district's role in erasing them and holds up high expectations to ensure that all students reach their academic potential.

“The Board of Education for Portland Public Schools is committed to the success of every student in each of our schools. The mission of Portland Public Schools is that by the end of elementary, middle, and high school, every student by name will meet or exceed academic standards and be fully prepared to make productive life decisions. We believe that every student has the potential to achieve, and it is the responsibility of our school district to give each student the opportunity and support to meet his or her highest potential.

In light of this mission and our beliefs, Portland Public Schools’ historic, persistent achievement gap between White students and students of color is unacceptable. While efforts have been made to address the inequities between White students and students of color, these efforts have been largely unsuccessful. Recognizing that there are other student groups that have not reached their achievement potential, this policy focuses on the most historically persistent achievement gap, which is that between White students and students of color. Closing this achievement gap while raising achievement for all students is the top priority of the Board of Education, the Superintendent and all district staff. Race must cease to be a predictor of student achievement and success.¹

In Portland Public Schools, for every year that we have data, White students have clearly outperformed Black, Hispanic and Native American students on state assessments in every subject at every grade level. White students consistently graduate at higher percentages than students of color, while students of color are disciplined far more frequently than White students. These disparities are unacceptable and are directly at odds with our belief that all children can achieve.

The responsibilities for the disparities among our young people rest with adults, not the children. We are aware that student achievement data from school districts across the country reveal similar patterns, and that complex societal and historical factors contribute to the inequities our students face. Nonetheless, rather than perpetuating disparities, Portland Public Schools must address and overcome this inequity and institutional racism, providing all students with the support and opportunity to succeed.

Portland Public Schools will significantly change its practice in order to achieve and maintain racial equity in education. 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.² The concept of educational equity goes beyond



formal equality—where all students are treated the same—to fostering a barrier-free environment where all students, regardless of race, have the opportunity to benefit equally. Educational equity benefits all students, and our entire community. Students of all races shall graduate from PPS ready to succeed in a racially and culturally diverse local, national and global community. To achieve educational equity, PPS will provide additional and differentiated resources to support the success of all students, including students of color.”

The policy establishes six goals to achieve racial equity for our students:

- A. The District shall provide every student with equitable access to high quality and culturally relevant instruction, curriculum, support, facilities and other educational resources, even when this means differentiating resources to accomplish this goal.
- B. The District shall create multiple pathways to success in order to meet the needs of our diverse students, and shall actively encourage, support and expect high academic achievement for students from all racial groups.
- C. The District shall recruit, employ, support and retain racially and linguistically diverse and culturally competent administrative, instructional and support personnel, and shall provide professional development to strengthen employees’ knowledge and skills for eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in achievement. Additionally, in alignment with the Oregon Minority Teacher Act, the District shall actively strive to have our teacher and administrator workforce reflect the diversity of our student body.
- D. The District shall remedy the practices, including assessment, that lead to the over-representation of students of color in areas such as special education and discipline, and the under-representation in programs such as talented and gifted and Advanced Placement.
- E. All staff and students shall be given the opportunity to understand racial identity, and the impact of their own racial identity on themselves and others.
- F. The District shall welcome and empower families, including underrepresented families of color (including those whose first language may not be English) as essential partners in their student’s education, school planning and District decision-making. The District shall create welcoming environments that reflect and support the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population and community. In addition, the District will include other partners who have demonstrated culturally-specific expertise -- including government agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses, and the community in general -- in meeting our educational outcomes.

In the policy, the Portland School Board commits to holding the Superintendent and all central and school leadership staff accountable for making measurable annual progress towards meeting these goals. The Board directs the Superintendent to develop action plans with clear accountability—including prioritizing staffing and budget allocations—to achieve these goals. The Superintendent will report on progress towards these goals twice a year, and will provide the Board with updated action plans each subsequent year.



5-YEAR RACIAL EQUITY PLAN

In order to successfully achieve the stated goals in its Racial Educational Equity Policy, Portland Public Schools has developed a 5-year plan. This plan directly addresses the six stated goals in the policy with the ultimate goal of educational equity: 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.

The 5-year plan outlines key strategies to achieve racial equity, along with metrics to evaluate progress. These key strategies will drive annual action plans which outline more detailed department-level work.

Racial Equity Strategies

Portland Public Schools identified the following four key areas that require significant investment and attention in order to achieve racial equity in the district.

1. Culturally Responsive Teaching & Learning

In order for the district to achieve educational equity, we must provide students of color with rigorous, culturally responsive, and engaging learning environments which accelerate their academic achievement and personal growth.

We believe:

If we provide students of color with equitable access to common core courses and high quality teachers who demonstrate culturally responsive instructional practices, they will achieve academic and personal success.

If we enroll emerging bilingual students in effective dual language programs, they will experience increased academic and personal success while preserving their native language, cultural identity and cultural heritage.

If we provide school and central leadership with professional development on culturally responsive positive behavior support systems, then referral rates for exclusionary discipline and special programs will decrease markedly for students of color.

If we partner with culturally-specific community organizations to provide personalized supports for students and families of color, then students of color will experience more inclusive and culturally relevant learning environments and ultimately, increased success.



2. Culturally Responsive Workforce

In order for the district to achieve educational equity, we must recruit, hire, promote and retain racially conscious and culturally responsive employees at every level across the organization.

By “cultural responsiveness” Portland Public Schools means “the knowledge, beliefs, skills, attitudes and practices that allow individuals to form relationships and create learning environments that support academic achievement and personal development of learners from diverse racial and cultural groups.”³

We believe:

If every employee is racially conscious and culturally responsive, then every staff member will exhibit the knowledge, attitudes, skills and practice to interrupt institutionalized racism and better meet the unique needs of students, families and staff of color.

If our workforce mirrors the student & family population we serve, then our organization will be better able to provide role models for students of color, better understand the needs of our students and families of color, and make better decisions for our families and students of color. Increasing the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of our organization increases the cultural responsiveness of our organization.

3. Culturally Responsive Family & Community Engagement

In order for the district to achieve educational equity, we must empower both families and communities of color to advocate for their children and give them meaningful access to both school- and district-level decision-making.

We believe:

Because of the District’s focus on majority culture communication style and pathways, families of color experience an information gap. If we provide families of color with equitable access to school and district information and practices, they will be empowered to better navigate the system, advocate for their children and support their academic and personal success.

If every PPS school develops a parent engagement plan which focuses on connecting families of color to the instructional goals of their school, there will be an increase in the number of culturally-specific family engagement opportunities at each school and ultimately, increased engagement with families of color.

Historically there was no established protocol for district stakeholder engagement, and the voice of students, families and communities of color was often marginalized. If we develop and implement a framework for equitable, transparent and consistent stakeholder



engagement—which clarifies roles and responsibilities and reduces barriers to participation for underserved communities—then we will see increased participation from students, families and communities of color.

4. Cultural & Organizational Transformation

In order for the district to achieve educational equity, we must undergo a cultural and organizational transformation to build a culture of inclusion and acceptance—one that actively challenges institutional racism. The Board and District leadership must actively examine and dismantle systemic policies, programs and practices that serve to perpetuate racial achievement disparities.

We believe:

If goals at every level in the district are based on data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, there will be increased accountability for meeting the needs of specific communities of color.

If we adopt culturally relevant data and research practices, we will be able to more accurately represent, assess and evaluate the needs and behaviors of students and families of color.

If we apply a Racial Equity Lens to key policies, programs, practices and decisions in core business areas—with an intentional focus on “equal outcomes” rather than “equal inputs”—students and families of color will experience more equitable outcomes.

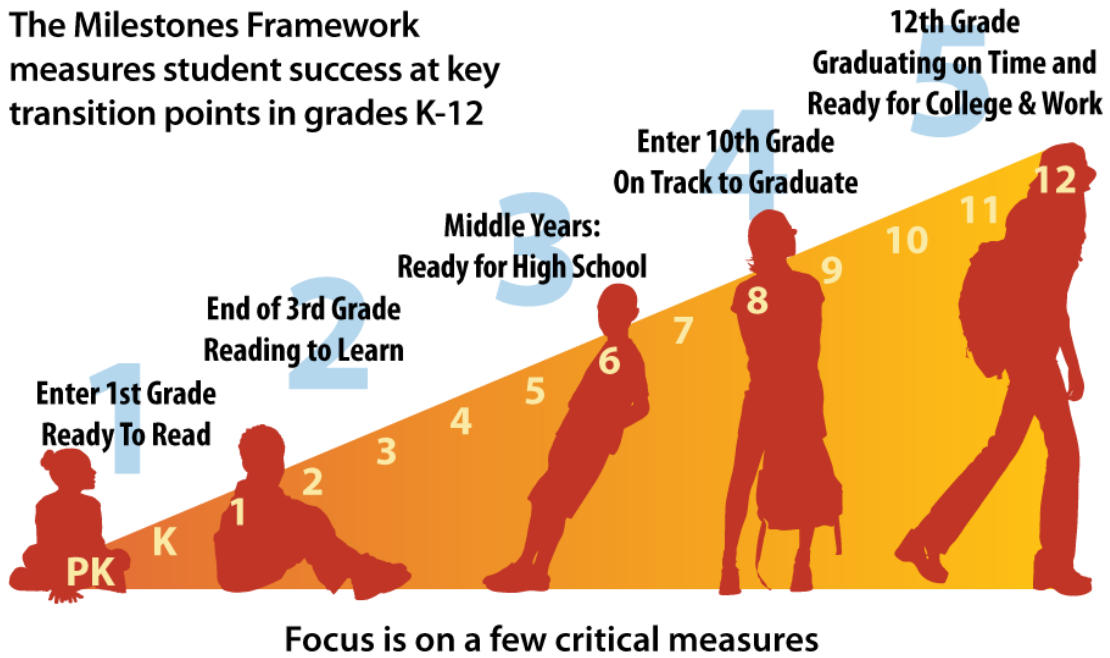
If we establish an Equity in Public Purchasing & Contracting (EPPC) policy and implement an EPPC program, we will demonstrate annual growth in the number of contracts secured with minority-owned, women-owned and emerging small businesses, promoting diversity and equal-opportunity.

Currently student enrollment is not balanced across the district, resulting in uneven distribution of students across schools and ultimately, an inability to provide students of color with equitable access to a strong core program. If we balance enrollment through boundary changes, policy changes, grade reconfigurations and/or other strategies using a Racial Equity Lens, every PPS school will have enrollment within the target range and every student will have access to a strong core program.



MEASURES OF SUCCESS

As a result of implementing these key strategies, Portland Public Schools will significantly improve achievement outcomes for students of color as measured by the Milestones Framework.



ENDNOTES

- 1 For the purpose of this policy, “race” is defined as “A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time. Racial categories subsume ethnic groups.” Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, editors (2007). *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*.
- 2 Singleton, Glenn & Linton, Curtis (2006). *Courageous Conversations About Race*.
- 3 Adapted from Randall B. Lindsey, Kikanza Nuri Robins, and Raymond D. Terrell (Corwin Press, 1999, 2003). *Cultural Proficiency*.