



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Date: July 13, 2020
To: PPS Board of Education
From: Guadalupe Guerrero, PPS Superintendent and
Dani Ledezma, Senior Advisor on Racial Equity and Social Justice
Subject: Superintendent's Charge RE: Renaming and Redefining PPS Spaces

This summer, amid a global pandemic, the glaring, systemic racism of our nation and its communities was brought to light for many. For over a month our community, like so many others across the US, has been in a continuous state of unrest as young people and Black, Indigenous and People of Color rise up to demand more of our institutions and put an end to systems of oppression. This collective movement has called all of us to action.

As leaders of Portland Public Schools, a 150-year-old preK-12 education system, we have the opportunity to channel the energy of this collective movement and to build upon the decades of work by Black, Indigenous and Communities of Color to disrupt the cultural and institutional racism that permeates our own system. It's tempting to dive into small tasks that journalist [Charles Blow](#) termed as "feel-good gestures that cost nothing and shift no power. They create no justice and provide no equity." Instead, he implores his audience to do "more than performative symbols of solidarity. We need more than narrow, chaste legislation."

It is this approach we implore our community to bring to our intentions and actions on the issue of renaming school buildings - a balanced approach that centers the voices and experiences of our students, especially Students of Color, and aligns with our racial equity and social justice framework and plan. While our students currently attend schools that venerate problematic historical leaders, they rarely have an opportunity to learn or see local - and national - leaders of color and therefore, school names must align to improving our teaching and learning efforts to give every student access a more robust learning experience that is culturally responsive, inclusive of a broader band of American culture, and critically stimulating.

Following the collective development and publication of our new district [Vision](#), Portland Public Schools has engaged with students, educators, and the community to reimagine how we can affirm and support our students through a positive and enriching school experience. Our theory of action clearly and unequivocally states:

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, realizes the Vision of the Graduate Portrait.

Holding firm to our values of racial equity and social justice, PPS prioritizes our Black, Indigenous and Students of Color. We ground this work with a focus on positive school climate, adult-student relationships, students' sense of belonging, cultural responsiveness, and student physical and emotional safety. This improved relational trust and engagement of our students plays a foundational role in raising academic achievement of our students. The progress we have made since the start of the 2018-19 school year includes:

- Increased opportunities to hear student voices: we have hosted listening sessions and focus groups on key district issues including student safety, PPS policy updates, PPS's 2020-21 Budget and Investment Priorities, and the proposed Bond renewal. Student voice will be integral in the 2020-21 Reentry planning, and the Enrollment and Program balancing process.
- Alignment of resources to increase student support: as part of our planning for the implementation of the Student Success Act and Student Investment Account Application, we held our most diverse and wide-ranging engagement processes to date, to develop an investment plan that aligned our resources with the most important needs of our students.
- Adoption of the [RESJ Framework and Plan](#) and the kick-off of the RESJ Advisory Team.
- The adoption of the [RESJ Professional Development Framework](#) and first-year pilot RESJ training and partnership with the Center for Equity and Inclusion in which 10 cohorts participated in professional development.
- Re-centering our focus on building our students' sense of belonging, positive cultural identity development, and academic success.
- Start of a multi-year strategic planning process and identification of a set of initial [educational system shifts](#) that focus on the need to cultivate a school culture of physical and emotional safety where every student has a positive and supportive experience.

With this foundation, we will make more changes to realize a positive student experience. And in light of the nationwide call to action, we are proposing a process that aligns with our values, commitment, [RESJ framework and plan](#), and culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogy to **ensure that renaming spaces is not a hollow action untethered to an improved and affirming student experience in those spaces.**

Superintendent's Charge to District Leaders

We are tasking senior district leaders and staff, in collaboration with key stakeholders, to:

1. Establish a **Renaming and Redefining Committee**, co-facilitated with PPS students, to design a set of recommendations to improve our administrative directive and procedures for naming buildings.
2. The Renaming and Redefining Committee will utilize a Racial Equity Design Process to evaluate the current administrative directive and suggest improvements in alignment with RESJ.
3. The committee will commence in September 2020, after the start of the school year, in order to maximize student leadership and participation. The committee will complete a five-phase process:

- a. Phase I: Scan - Refine the charge, review current administrative directives and procedures, conduct empathy interviews. (September 2020)
- b. Phase II: Case Study - Review and study Wilson HS renaming process and define issue areas and potential solutions (October - December 2020; Board Approval Tentative - December 2020)
- c. Phase III: Ideate - brainstorm new / revised solutions in alignment with RESJ and Culturally Responsive/Sustaining pedagogy (December - January 20/21)
- d. Phase IV: Propose - Draft administrative directive and practice changes, propose to Superintendent. (February - March 2021)
- e. Phase V: Reflect - Develop six-month and subsequent annual review process for proposal (April 2021)

1. This committee will invite student representatives / District's Student Advisory Council / other student affinity groups, as well as staff from RESJ, Engagement, Office of Teaching and Learning, Office of School Performance, Office of School Modernization, Planning and Real Estate Management, Communications, School Administrators and educators. Staff and other stakeholders such as the RESJ partners will be important in our continuing efforts, the ultimate success of which will be defined, decided and declared by the students we serve.

1. Develop **clear guidance** for school communities about how the renaming process is aligned with culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogy at each school site.

1. Continue our **strategic planning process**, focused on direct student and educator engagement to promote the skills, mindsets, and dispositions of the Graduate Profile and Educator Essentials.

Alignment of Resources to Support this Work

Emphasizing student safety and school culture, the Superintendent's [2020-2021 strategic priorities, investment plan, and budget message](#) proposes to invest Student Investment Account (SIA) monies toward direct services to students and resources, programs and staffing that encourage students' sense of self, sense of belonging, and overall well being.

Our proposed investment plan includes:

- **Increased funding for Racial Equity and Social Justice strategies** to be executed by culturally specific organizations in six key areas:
 - Family Engagement
 - Wrap-Around Services
 - Mentoring and Leadership Development
 - Extended-Day and Enrichment Activities
 - Positive Cultural Identity Development and Advocacy
 - Crisis Response
- Increased funding to provide students, especially our Students of Color, meaningful opportunities to participate in **youth-led activities** such as student conferences and school-based **affinity groups**.

Coordination and Measuring Progress

We are tasking Shanice Clarke and the Community Engagement team to lead the Renaming and Redefining Spaces Committee as outlined above. We expect a quarterly progress report to help us monitor progress and maintain accountability.