



## BSD7 Equity Talking Points - July, 2021

This document is intended to provide clarity, detail, and intent related to equity work in Bozeman Public Schools. The term equity has garnered national attention as well as local attention, and without clear and transparent communication it opens the door for assumptions and division. The Board of Trustees meeting on [June 28, 2021](#) included important community public comment on a draft equity policy/procedure and was a reminder that more work must be done to communicate and provide BSD7 specific information and data to support the work. Providing additional information and opportunities for dialogue is intended to remove the polarization and politicization of the topic/s. Topics Include:

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### Background Information

Equity work in Bozeman Public Schools is grounded in the District's **core purpose** and **core values** contained in the District's Long Range Strategic Plan ([LRSP](#)), specifically the statements referring to all/every student succeeding and achieving at high levels:

#### **Core Purpose of the Bozeman Public School District:**

"Bozeman Public Schools exist to provide an outstanding education that inspires and ensures high achievement so **every student** can succeed and make a difference in a rapidly changing world community."

#### **Core Values of the Bozeman Public School District:**

- High Student Achievement: We are committed to ensuring that **all students** achieve at high levels.
- Committed, Quality Staff: We employ and retain well qualified and talented staff members who demonstrate a commitment to the core purpose of the District.
- Community and Family Engagement: We believe that parents and the community are essential contributors in the achievement of our goals.
- Climate: We operate in a climate of respect, honesty and hard work, recognizing the need to be adaptable and open to change.

- **Fiscal Responsibility:** We are fiscally responsible in the management and expenditure of all District resources.
- **Decision Making:** We rely on best practices research to guide our decision-making.

## Communication Plan

Communication and dialogue is important. The information in this document will be shared with BSD7 parents and staff via email prior to the July 12 Board Meeting. The document will also be shared as a press release for community stakeholders. Additionally, the opportunities below are intended to provide further opportunity for information sharing and public engagement.

**Board Education** - July 12, 2021 - Gallatin High School - Johnson Auditorium 5:45pm

The purpose of this Board Education session is to present to the Board of Trustees the highlights contained in these talking points and allow the Trustees to ask questions and discuss. Board Education presentations are followed by public comment. Please note that public comment doesn't allow for a back and forth dialogue between the Board and the public.

**Community Conversations** - The purpose of community conversations are to bring together community stakeholders for facilitated conversations in an effort to gain understanding and clarity around equity work in the district, and to provide feedback to district administration as they move forward. These sessions are designed to include opportunities for large and small group discussion, as well as opportunities for Q&A.

If you would like to participate in community conversations regarding equity work in the district please fill out [THIS FORM](#) to be included in future correspondence regarding scheduled listening sessions. The specifics (format, dates, times) will be built around the number of participants who want to engage in the conversation.

Feedback from the June 28 Board Meeting, as well as the scheduled Board Education and Community Conversation sessions, will help clarify any needed modifications to the draft equity policy/procedure. The revisions to the draft policy/procedure will be brought back to the Board of Trustees at a future date.

## Language Matters

It has become increasingly clear that language really matters as does the intent behind the language being used. The draft policy discussion on [June 28, 2021](#) was in-part tied to draft policy 3610 and draft procedure 3610P, both entitled, **Student Inclusion, Equity,**

**Opportunity, Achievement and Success.** Below are some working definitions and comments regarding each of the words from the draft policy above:

### **Inclusion**

Inclusion refers to a school community where all members are and feel respected, have a sense of belonging, and are able to participate and achieve to their potential.

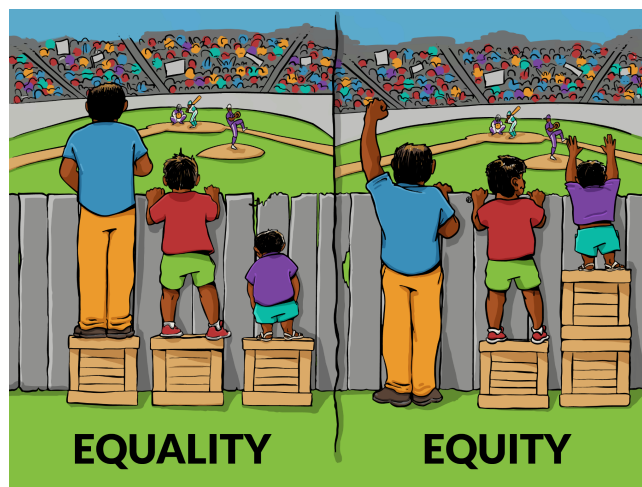
### **Equity**

Equity means that each student, regardless of race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex\*, ethnicity, language barrier, religious belief, physical or mental handicap or disability, economic or social condition, actual or potential marital or parental status, gender\*, or sexual orientation\* will have access to the opportunities, resources, and support they need to attain their full potential.

\*Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation are noted separately above and in draft policy to comply with a recent [notice of interpretation](#) from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights explaining that it will enforce Title IX's prohibition on discrimination on the basis of sex to include: (1) discrimination based on sexual orientation; and (2) discrimination based on gender identity. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity offered by a recipient of federal financial assistance.

### **Equality Vs. Equity**

Recent public comment has reiterated that the term, equity, in and of itself is a polarizing word. It is important to note that the District is looking at equity through the lens of **equitable opportunities (inputs)** for students as opposed to equitable outcomes (outputs). The District maintains high standards for all students and understands that different students need different supports and services (inputs) to achieve their full potential. This is different from equality where all students receive the same thing. The image below articulates this concept, and for context the ability to see over the fence is akin to the high standards we have for all students. The fence is not lowered, but rather supports are added to ensure all students have an **equitable opportunity** to reach the goal.



Further putting the image in context, here are some examples where BSD7 applies the concept of equity in ensuring equitable opportunities for students:

- Students identified with specific learning disabilities in reading may require extra time and specialized instruction to attain grade level reading standards.
- Students who are diabetic may require a specific health care plan inclusive of nursing services to ensure health and educational opportunity.
- Students new to the country may require extra time and specific instruction in Academic English to ensure their success in grade level content.

### **Opportunity**

Opportunity is defined as a good chance for advancement or progress. Opportunity is an open door to programs, resources, and support that allow all students to pursue academic, social, emotional, and behavioral success.

The District understands that barriers may exist that would prevent students from having equitable opportunities. When those barriers are identified the District works to support students in overcoming the obstacles.

### **Achievement**

Achievement typically refers to academic performance measured against district, state, or national standards/criteria. The district's core purpose is rooted in high achievement for **all** students. It is important to note that all means all, and that the bar isn't lowered to ensure we get there. **Achievement doesn't mean equal outcomes. Achievement means clear articulation of the goal/bar, and then measuring and assessing students in relation to what they need to reach that bar.**

### **Success**

Success also refers to the BSD7 core purpose of students making a difference in a rapidly changing world community. Success means students leave our school district well prepared to tackle any college or career aspirations they choose to pursue.

## **Why Equity Work - Where Did This Come From ?**

BSD7 is a high-performing AA school district in Montana and has so much to be proud of. As a District we are making great strides in reaching the 'Big Audacious Goal' articulated in the Long Range Strategic Plan ([LRSP](#)), "The Bozeman Public School District is student-centered and known as a vibrant, flexible, purposeful and progressive educational system that values diversity, models community engagement, provides numerous opportunities to generate individual student growth and engage students to succeed and positively contribute in a global community."

It is important to note, however, that we continue to have work to do to ensure all students have equitable opportunities and support to reach their full potential. **Equity work in Bozeman Public Schools is foundationally tied to current and historical achievement gaps in the district.**

BSD7 shows comparatively strong proficiency in literacy and math on state assessments - however, Bozeman has about 30% fewer economically disadvantaged students than the average Montana district, including other AA districts and still nearly 40% of students are not meeting proficiency in math and literacy on state assessments in grades 3-8 and 11. Various subgroups of students (economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, English Learners, etc.) are disproportionately a part of the achievement gap.

Graduation Rates show similar achievement gaps. Based upon 2018-2019 data, the District Graduation Rate was 85.4%, while economically disadvantaged students = 65.8%, students with disabilities = 66.7%, Hispanic students = 75.6%. There are other indicators that show similar trends: participation in AP courses, attendance rates, etc.

## What Is The Focus Of BSD7 Equity Work?

Current equity work is focused on students, specifically in providing equitable opportunities for student success. Draft policy 3610 outlines that focus on student success and sets a high bar for the organization to meet students where they are at and move them forward:

*The District is committed to:*

- *Providing all students with access to resources, opportunities, supports and interventions to ensure that they maximize their abilities and potential.*
- *Giving individual students what they need to meet their learning and well-being requirements.*
- *Assuring that all BSD7 staff members, with deliberate effort, continue to examine and eliminate institutional beliefs, policies, practices, and teaching that perpetuate disparities in achievement.*
- *Raising the achievement of all students while eliminating any identified opportunity or achievement gaps.*
- *Filtering programs, initiatives, and budget supports to maximize student inclusion, equity, opportunity, achievement and success.*

*The Bozeman Public Schools provide a PK-12 district-wide, general education process that systematically identifies individual student needs, provides high quality, research-informed universal instruction and interventions, and monitors student progress through data driven systems. Adjustments to instruction and interventions are based on students' performance and rate of success. A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a systemic,*

*continuous-improvement framework in which data-based problem solving and decision making is practiced across all levels of the educational system for supporting students. MTSS provides high-quality, standards-based instruction and intervention that is matched to students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs.* From Draft Policy 3610

Future equity work in Bozeman Public School may entail looking at **equitable opportunities** for students through various lenses:

1. **Curriculum & Instruction**
  - a. Instruction that challenges, engages, and empowers learners
  - b. Access to standards-based, content-rich, culturally affirming curriculum and instruction
  - c. Respectful civil discourse across content areas
2. **Policy:**
  - a. Explore how district policies can underscore a safe, welcoming, inclusive, and successful school experience for all.
  - b. Thorough review of all policies
3. **Engagement**
  - a. School culture that fosters positive identity, belonging, agency, and purpose
  - b. Professional development
  - c. Community conversations
  - d. Human resources practices/processes

## What is the Charge of the Equity Advisory Committee?

The BSD7 Equity Advisory Committee acts in an advisory capacity to the Board of Trustees and Superintendent by providing support, guidance, and information about issues related to **equity, diversity and inclusion** in our schools and programs and by recommending changes to policy, procedure and practices within the district to make the Bozeman Public Schools a more welcoming, inclusive organization. The committee is made up of BSD7 students, staff, administrators, Trustees, and community stakeholders. The main charges of the Task Force are:

1. Operationalize what *equity* means for BSD7 and its staff, families and students.
  - a. Equity is not intended to create winners and losers
  - b. Equity is intended to ensure that all students experience a safe, welcoming, inclusive, and successful school experience.
2. Engage in courageous conversations throughout the District.
3. Establish the framework to transform BSD7 into a leading educational system that addresses the opportunity and achievement gaps for all students.
4. Eliminate disparities and inequitable practices and implement inclusive practices.
5. Honor individuality and guarantee respectful treatment for all individuals.

6. Ensure consistently high expectations for all student groups.

The committee acts in an advisory capacity only and is on pause for the summer. The committee's meetings will be publicly noticed on the BSD7 website. The work of the committee, once developed in draft form, will be presented to the board at a public meeting with the BSD7 Board of Trustees having final say in any and all actions, recommendations, or policies.

## What About Critical Race Theory (CRT) ?

Community members have brought forth concerns that there is a perception that the equity work in the District will lead to or open the door for the adoption of Critical Race Theory. That perception seems to be fueled in part by the Equity Advisory Committee reading Ibram X. Kendi's book, *How to Be an Antiracist*. It is important to note that the Equity Advisory Committee is just beginning its work and is reading and using a variety of sources and voices to better understand the achievement and opportunity gaps within our district.

Circling back to the importance of language, below are some working definitions of Critical Race Theory (CRT) from two separate sources/viewpoints.

Critical Race Theory [From Time Magazine](#)

What is critical race theory?

Critical race theory offers a way of seeing the world that helps people recognize the effects of historical racism in modern American life. The intellectual movement behind the idea was started by legal scholars as a way to examine how laws and systems uphold and perpetuate inequality for traditionally marginalized groups. In Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic's book *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, they define the critical race theory movement as "a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power."

Critical Race Theory [The Heritage Foundation](#)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) makes race the prism through which its proponents analyze all aspects of American life—and do so with a degree of persistence that has helped CRT impact all of American life. CRT underpins identity politics, an ongoing effort to reimagine the United States as a nation riven by groups, each with specific claims on victimization. In entertainment, as well as the education and workforce sectors of society, CRT is well-established, driving decision-making according to skin color—not individual value and talent. As Critical Theory ideas become more familiar to the viewing public in everyday life, CRT's intolerance becomes "normalized," along with the idea of systemic racism for Americans, weakening public and private bonds that create trust and allow for civic engagement.



Montana Attorney General, Austin Knudsen, weighed in on CRT via a binding opinion on [May 27, 2021](#). Bozeman Public Schools is currently in compliance and will remain in compliance with the binding opinion. Specifically, **The District is not looking to adopt a specific curriculum related to Critical Race Theory**. The District adopts curriculum via district policy #2100 and 2100P through a very public process. The District also follows district policy #2311 - Instructional Materials, with regards to use of curriculum resources. Additional aspects of the binding AG opinion related to Bozeman Public Schools are referenced below with a definitive yes/no regarding the District's practices.

Does the District:

- Utilize classroom instruction that permits, promotes, or endorses curricula or pedagogical methods that tell an individual that he or she should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race? No
- Are students segregated in any capacity based on race? No
- Engage in activities which separates students, teachers, or employees by race, e.g., separating whites and non-whites, or offering various "racially exclusive affinity groups" that separate students, parents and community members by race? No
- Implement a disciplinary policy that includes "explicit direction" to staffers to consider a student's race when meting out discipline? No
- Believe that all white people are inherently racist? No
- Discourage members of any race from participating in any particular program or activity, or allow students or staff to be excluded on the basis of race? No
- Create "safe spaces" that admit or exclude individuals on the basis of race? No
- Grade students differently or apply different grading criteria to students based on race? No
- Allow or disallow student participation in class or complete assignments on the basis of their race? No
- Discipline students differently on the basis of race? No
- Engage in racial stereotyping, which means ascribing character traits, values, moral and ethical codes, privileges, status, or beliefs to a race or to an individual because of their race? No
- Use materials that assert that one race is inherently superior or inferior to another? No
- Engage/participate in "privilege walks" that treat students differently based on race? No
- Force individuals to admit privilege or punish them for failing to do so? No
- Force members of certain races to "reflect," "deconstruct," or "confront" their racial identities or be instructed to be "less white" (or less of any other race, ethnicity, or national origin)? No
- Ask that certain students engage, or not engage, with the class in a specific manner based on race? No
- Engage in "race scapegoating," which means assigning fault, blame, or bias to a race or to members of a race because of their race. Examples consist of instructing



students that all white people perpetuate systemic racism or that all white people are born racist? No

- Assert that an individual's moral character is necessarily determined by race or that individuals need to be "accountable" due solely to their race, or that they are "culpable" solely due to their race? No
- Instruct or compel individuals to apologize for their race or force to admit privilege based on their race? No
- Advocate that a particular race is negative or evil or that members of a particular race or racial identity pose specific dangers to other individuals? No
- Permit, promote, or endorse curricula or pedagogical methods that tell an individual that they should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of their race? No
- Advocate that students adopt specific beliefs based on their race, such as urging that white students be white without signing on to whiteness? No
- Attempt to purge the idea of "whiteness" (or any other race) from schools? No
- Engage in curricula or discussion or activity that pressures members of a certain race to repudiate or "recover from" their race? No
- Segregate students in any capacity on the basis of race? Yes\*
- Deny programs and activities on the basis of race? Yes\*
- Offer housing, counseling, mentoring, liaisons, or networking in a way that favors or excludes individuals on the basis of race? Yes\*
- Use race when administering academic programs? Yes\*

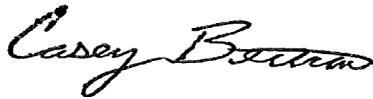
\* The four bullet points above are noted with a 'yes' specifically related to federal Title VI Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education funding and associated programs that are limited to participants via racial qualification. Title VI funding is designed to support the efforts of school districts, Indian tribes and organizations, colleges, and other entities to meet the unique academic needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives so that these students can achieve the same challenging state standards as all students. The Bozeman Title VI parent committee reviews the district's goals annually in order to ensure that the needs of local students are being met. The grant provides additional support to qualifying students in the core academic areas with a focus on reading and mathematics.

A noted theme of community concern related to the draft equity policy and procedure was specific language in the Equity Advisory Committee vision and mission statements that were perceived as opening the door for Critical Race Theory curriculum. Please note, the District understands those concerns and is actively looking at revising language to better align with the intent of the policy/procedure - providing **equitable opportunities** for student success.

It is important to note district policy #2330, Controversial Issues and Academic Freedom, that ensures our staff approach controversial/politicized issues with balance and care. On an annual basis, principals talk with teachers about academic freedom policies and how to ensure a balanced approach to controversial issues in class discussions. The end goal is to help students consider multiple sources/perspectives and become critical thinkers.

Race does come up in District Curriculum particularly in the social studies/history content areas in regards to both US and Montana History. Montana's [constitutional requirement and duly enacted policy](#) require recognition of the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and a commitment in our educational goals to preserve their cultural heritage. The [Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians](#) include specific essential understandings related to an understanding of federal policies put into place throughout American history that have affected Indian people and continue to shape who they are today. Every Montanan, whether Indian or non-Indian, should be encouraged to learn about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians in a culturally responsive manner.

Thank you for your continued support of Bozeman Public Schools.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Casey Bertram". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Casey Bertram  
Interim Superintendent  
Bozeman Public Schools