

# Portland Public Schools Equity Policy

## **Purpose and Scope:**

Portland Public Schools (PPS) acknowledges that in order to create equity, it must be able to recognize, respond to and redress inequity. PPS recognizes the historical, generational, and compounding reality of the systems, structures, and practices that have created and continued to afford advantages to some groups while perpetuating inequities for others. The district takes responsibility for removing, and actively repairing these inequities to ensure positive educational outcomes for all children.

Through this policy, the district accepts its responsibility to remove barriers that create or perpetuate academic achievement disparities, disproportionalities in discipline, disparities in access to grade-level curriculum, advanced classes, gifted and talented identification, and involvement in co-curricular activities, as well as overidentification of students learning English for special education. Additionally PPS acknowledges students' and educators' experiences of harassment and discrimination as described in 2020 through the Social Media Report and the Educators of Color Insights Report.

The purpose of this policy is to respond to and redress inequities by establishing a shared definition for "equity" and by identifying the ways in which PPS will be accountable for acting in alignment with this definition. Additionally this policy identifies expectations for the ways in which the district will advance equity. Finally this policy is designed to provide a lens by which to evaluate all other policies, practices, and procedures throughout the district.

Fundamentally, this policy communicates the district's commitment to staying vigilant in supporting each and every student's particular path to achieving high standards while rooting out systemic and ongoing inequities at the student and staff level.

## **Definitions:**

The following definitions establish a shared understanding of the terms or phrases related to equity for the Portland Public Schools. These definitions are established in response to the fact that many people use the word "equity" but mean different things such as sameness or equality. Equality is antithetical to the definition for equity that is held in PPS and a precise understanding of equity and these related terms is essential to understanding the intent of this policy.

- A. **Equity:** Equity is all people being held to high expectations and having access to opportunities that are reflective of their individual needs, identities and experiences. Equity is achieved in Portland Public Schools when there are no identifiable differences in outcomes and experiences for any population sub-group (race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, etc).
- B. **Racial Equity:** Is achieved when outcomes cannot be predicted or identified by race.
- C. **Equity Lens:** Using an "equity lens" is the ongoing practice of centering equity in decision making. This means asking ourselves key questions like: Who is benefiting from this? Whose voice/perspective is being centered in this decision? Who may be being

harmed or excluded? What steps can be taken to mitigate disparity? How am I assessing and measuring equity?

- D. Cultural Humility: The ongoing practice of being open to others' identities, cultures and norms, and learning how individuals want to be treated. Having a stance of cultural humility includes self reflection in order to address assumptions or biases we may hold about others based on their identities.
- E. Equity Literacy: As defined by the Equity Literacy Institute, is the understanding and action required to create equitable schools. It is about both the commitment to individual and institutional understandings of how equity and inequity operate as well as the individual and institutional knowledge, skills, and will to identify and eliminate inequities, and actively cultivating equity. The five abilities of equity literacy include:
  - a. The ability to recognize even the subtlest biases and inequities;
  - b. The ability to respond skillfully and equitably to biases and inequities in the immediate term;
  - c. The ability to redress biases and inequities by understanding and addressing them at their institutional roots;
  - d. The ability to actively cultivate equity by applying an equity commitment to every decision, and;
  - e. The ability to sustain equity efforts even in the face of discomfort or resistance.

## **Policy Expectations:**

### **A. Staff & Capacity Building:**

- a. Professional Development: All PPS staff are expected to participate in professional development opportunities related to equity. While some opportunities will be made available as opt-in learning experiences, all staff are expected to take part in the common professional development work that is rolled out across the district or building/department each year. This professional development will include topics focused on understanding historical, systemic and cultural biases and oppressions and the application of this knowledge to education. This professional development is to be grounded in best practice, research and informed by the experiences of people within the PPS system who have experienced oppression and marginalization.
  - i. Part of the district professional development must include an orientation to this policy for all staff as well as for students.
- b. Staff Evaluation: PPS educators and staff are responsible for bringing an equity lens to their work. Evaluation tools and processes will incorporate opportunities for reflection and feedback on the degree to which staff utilize an equity lens in their work and on their impact and outcomes as it pertains to addressing opportunity gaps and inequities.
- c. Hiring, Recruitment, Advancement:
  - i. The district recruits, hires, develops, and retains equity literate and linguistically diverse teachers, administrators, and staff who are racially diverse and reflect the cultures and identities of the student population served.

- ii. The district uses and maintains the Equity Hiring Toolkit, a PPS resource designed to hire talented and qualified staff while understanding and mitigating bias in the hiring process. This resource is updated and maintained on an ongoing basis by the Human Resources department of PPS.
  - 1. Hiring managers are required to use this resource and staff who participate on hiring committees or support hiring are required to review the toolkit and/or participate in training.
- iii. PPS supports career pathways for existing BIPOC staff to enter and advance within the system. We recognize and affirm the importance of training and support for new BIPOC educators and those who want to become educators is prioritized.

B. **Curriculum and Instruction:** In PPS, we strive to use an equity-based curriculum, which outlines both what we teach (content) and how we teach it (pedagogy, including teacher practices and collaboration, cultural humility). Both are essential to creating more equitable outcomes. The district ensures equitable access to curricular materials, practices, instruction, and assessment. Students receive and experience equitable teaching practices and programming relevant to their specific academic needs, including specialized programming and support models that create opportunities for historically oppressed learners to thrive in academic programs. PPS acknowledges that the curriculum taught in our schools has not been representative of the diverse and broad identities present in our system, and our practices have been inequitable, and we commit to redressing this inequity. This policy outlines that:

- a. All educators (classroom, content, ELL, special ed, etc.) must integrate practices that make engaging and relevant grade level curriculum accessible to all students, including students learning English and students with disabilities.
- b. We deliver instruction that prioritizes students' strengths and values student thinking and agency.
- c. We empower students by teaching curricula that highlight the accomplishments of people with diverse backgrounds, including people whose identities reflect our student population.
- d. We provide students with opportunities to understand the experiences, histories, and possibilities of others and reflect on those of their own.
- e. We give opportunities to learn about and grapple with systemic racism and other uncomfortable historic truths.
- f. We hold high expectations for all students, and create appropriate support systems to ensure all students meet those expectations so they are prepared and empowered for their next goal.

C. **School Environment:** Equity in the school environment means that the experience of entering into a PPS building for students and staff is inclusive, safe, welcoming and brings with it a sense of feeling valued to that educational community. By naming this priority in the equity policy, PPS acknowledges the ongoing work required to ensure that both the physical and emotional environments of our school spaces matter to achieving equity. This commitment to attend to the physical and emotional aspects of equity is essential as the success of individuals in our system is limited when our school environment is isolating, hostile or physically inaccessible.

- a. Physical Space: The physical spaces are accessible to all people with varying abilities and disabilities.
- b. Climate and Culture: The experience of being at school is welcoming, inclusive and safe for all.

#### D. Implementation Strategies

- a. **Utilizing Land Acknowledgements:** Land acknowledgements are a way to recognize the history as well as the present of the place we live in. These can be used for formal public gatherings (school board meetings, school wide events, large parent/community engagements) or as part of visual displays in buildings or spaces that are part of PPS. Land acknowledgements are a way of actively reflecting on the realities of colonization in the United States but do not stand alone. Land acknowledgements in PPS are connected to our broader curriculum, instruction, and school environment efforts to improve inclusion and advance equity.
  - i. The following is an example land acknowledgement that has been utilized by the Superintendent of PPS: *Portland Public Schools recognizes the original inhabitants of the land on which our City and Schools stand: The Maliseet/Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq, Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribes, known collectively as the Wabanaki Confederacy, or "People of the Dawnland." We are honored to have Wabanaki children among our students today, and the district is committed to making the past, present, and future of Wabanaki peoples visible in our schools and classrooms.*
- b. **Resource Allocation:** Resources are allocated in alignment with strategies that are designed to advance equity across the system.
  - i. The annual budget is evaluated from the perspective of how it aligns to the stated goals and expectations laid out in this policy. The superintendent is accountable for building an annual budget that clearly articulates how it advances equity.
  - ii. Any school based activity or opportunity for students needs to be made available for all students and must not require a financial burden beyond what a family can afford. Furthermore, policies and practices for ensuring all students are able to access all school-based or school-sponsored opportunities must not put an additional burden on families to prove a level of need in order to access financial support to participate except where required by State or Federal law.
- c. **Engagement and Collaboration:**

Ongoing community engagement is essential to making all aspects of the equity policy effective. Community is defined as students, staff and caregivers of students as well as community organizations and support people who work with PPS students and families. PPS will utilize multiple methods for community engagement and feedback. The district's communication strategy facilitates

interactions where students and families feel welcomed, empowered, and treated as authentic thought partners in the educational process.

- i. Systems and structures are in place to uplift and amplify student voice as it pertains to decision making and accountability related to this policy.
  - ii. Language translation/interpretation for both written and oral communication will be provided as appropriate (See PPS policies IHBEC and IHBEC-R).
  - iii. The district forms and nurtures partnerships with external stakeholders that have a demonstrated commitment to supporting racial equity.
  - iv. PPS collaborates with partnering organizations to hear the voices of families and stakeholders in the community to inform decision making as it relates to resource allocation.
- d. **Data Utilization:** As practicable, all data utilized by the district are disaggregated by race, economic background, language, and special education status (at a minimum) in order to understand outcomes based on various identities of our students. The role of data utilization in this policy is to respond to and redress disparity among student subgroups in order to support effective problem-solving and ensure accountability for progress toward eliminating gaps between student groups. The district will:
- i. Establish goals and measures that directly address closing the opportunity gaps and addressing disparities and disproportionality.
  - ii. Engage in ongoing data-based reflection on student achievement, discipline, student engagement, and family engagement in order to recognize inequities and to understand the root causes in order to respond to and redress those inequities.
  - iii. Ensure that the data collected give insight into progress as it pertains to redressing inequities.
  - iv. Ensure that goal setting and data collection includes qualitative measures in addition to quantitative measures. Part of the qualitative data collected should illuminate the student experience in their classes and all school related experiences (e.g. sports, on transportation, etc.) and should be collected in such a way as to ensure students feel safe sharing their true experiences and feedback.
  - v. The district, schools and departments will carry out periodic "equity audits". These audits will be grounded in looking at a set of data (qualitative, quantitative or both) to better understand areas of equity and inequity. An equity audit is used as a process to evaluate policies, programs and practices through an equity lens.
- e. **Compliance:** At a minimum, the superintendent or their designee will report to the Board of Education on progress and outcomes related to this policy annually. This entails the following steps:
- i. Goal Setting: Annual equity focused goals are set at the district and school levels in order to ensure ongoing accountability. Goals are actionable and time bound steps that will be taken to redress inequities.

- ii. Progress Monitoring and Outcome Reporting: Annual reporting of disaggregated data related to student outcomes and experiences. Data will be made accessible to the public (via board meeting presentations, annual reports and community newsletters).
- iii. Policy Development: All newly established policies and practices must be developed with an explicit process that applies an equity lense, including the consideration of expectations enumerated in this policy. Application of the expectations in this policy should also be considered when reviewing existing policies and practices.
- iv. Annual review of the Equity Policy: This policy is reviewed annually and on an ongoing basis with all staff so that it is well known to staff and students in the PPS system. This policy is included for specific review in new employee orientation for all staff.

**Cross References:**

- AC - Nondiscrimination-Equal Opportunity Affirmative Action
- ACAA - Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students
- ACAA-R - Student Discrimination and Harassment Complaint Procedure
- ACAB- Harassment and Sexual Harassment of School Employees
- ACAB-R - Employee & Third Party Discrimination and Harassment Complaint Procedure
- IHBEC - Interpretation and Translation Services for Speakers of Languages Other Than English
- IHBEC-R - Procedure for Assessing Need and Providing Interpreter and Translation Services
- JB - Transgender and Gender Expansive Students
- JICIA- Weapons, Violence and School Safety
- JICK - Bullying and Cyberbullying in Schools
- JK - Student Discipline
- JKD - Suspension of Students
- JKE - Expulsion of Students