

Equity and Diversity

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish a framework for the elimination of bias, particularly racism and cultural bias, as factors affecting student achievement and other learning experiences, and to promote learning and work environments that welcome, respect and value diversity.

Further the purpose is to establish particular actions that the District shall take to address either real or perceived disparities in educational opportunity, treatment and achievement.

BACKGROUND

Every student deserves a respectful learning environment in which his/her racial and ethnic diversity is openly valued and contributes to successful academic, social and emotional outcomes. Mercer Island School District is committed to proactively identifying and correcting practices and policies that perpetuate disparate treatment among children and their families and institutional racism in all forms in order to provide all of its students with the opportunity to succeed and feel valued and respected.

Learning and work environments are enriched and improved by the contributions, perspectives and very presence of diverse participants. Mercer Island School District is committed to the success of every student in each of our schools and to our mission and vision statements.

The Board of Directors believes that the responsibility for student success is broadly shared by District staff, families, our community and our students' own efforts. Achievement gaps between white students and students of color and other diverse groups are unacceptable if we are to meet our mission and vision statements and our moral obligations to our students, their families and our community as a whole.

These gaps are contrary to our belief that all children can learn and succeed. Adult behaviors must not contribute to achievement gaps or create barriers to success. Adult behaviors must be concentrated on elimination of gaps, particularly those that are predicated on a student's race, ethnicity, home language, personal characteristics or culture and on assurance of educational equity between students.

The Board of Directors, Superintendent and staff are committed to Board Policy 2020, which requires ongoing evaluation of the diversity and equity fundamental. This commitment also includes conducting assessments on policies that are periodically reviewed and updated through the policy development process that have a significant impact on student learning and resources allocation.

The diversity of our student body, our community and our staff is a strength of this district that should be fostered and harnessed. Educational equity benefits all students and our entire community.

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II. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy the following terms shall have these meanings:

A. "diversity" includes characters of persons including, but not limited to: race, marital status, culture, family structure, color, citizenship status, creed or religion, sexual orientation or affectional preference, national origin, gender identity or expression, gender, economic status, mental and physical ability, veteran's status, age, any other protected class in conformance with federal, state and local laws.

B. “District staff” includes all employees, consultants and contractors of Mercer Island School District.

C. “Educational equity” means raising the achievement of all students while narrowing the gaps between the lowest and highest performing students, and eliminating the racial or cultural predictability and disproportionality of which students groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories as well as access to certain district and school-based programs.

D. “Institutional racism” means the collective failure of a public or private organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their race, color, culture or ethnic origin which can be seen or detected in practices, processes, systems, attitudes and behavior. It proactively looks beyond individual acts of prejudice to the systemic biases that may be built into institutions. These systemic biases discriminate against and disadvantage people of color through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness or racial stereotyping.

III. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The District welcomes, respects and values the diversity of its students, parents, staff and the broader community.

The following are established as District values:

1. All students deserve optimal treatment, opportunities and education.
2. All students and their families have dignity and worth.
3. All students are equally, while differently, gifted.
4. Academic and participation outcomes, not intentions, shall be the measure of whether we are successful.
5. Inclusion of all students and families supports District goals to increase student engagement and academic performance.
6. Embracing our diversity through inclusion creates an environment that leverages that diversity and creates schools where students, families, community members and employees feel welcomed, valued, supported, and where students and staff can perform to their personal bests.

The District is committed to advancing optimal participation by diverse students, parents, staff and community. The District is committed to promoting and providing equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, facilities and supports, even when this means differentiating resource allocations on the basis of student needs. Resource allocation shall support the definition of educational equity adopted in this policy while complying with state and federal funding mandates.

The District shall employ staffing processes and new hires that support and engender racial, gender, and language diversity in its staff through recruitment, employment, training and retention of employees.

It is important that children of all races, cultures, and backgrounds are provided with familiar role models in schools. The recruitment of diverse teachers and staff provides all students with a better chance of seeing themselves as part of the education system. Diversity in education provides all children with the opportunity to learn from others with dissimilar backgrounds and recognizes the value of diversity in all learning environments.

The District is committed to increasing the recruitment and retention of highly qualified diverse staff. The District is committed to fostering a learning environment where diversity is encouraged and to recruiting and retaining a workforce that reflects the diversity of our students and community. We are committed to hiring the best employees of all racial and ethnic backgrounds who will bring their unique talents and skills into our school system.

The Superintendent is directed to offer opportunities for all staff to improve its cultural competencies in serving our diverse student body and community with annual training and refresher classes.

The District staff shall work together to increase their individual and collective capacity to effectively teach a racially and ethnically diverse student population and serve racially and ethnically diverse families and communities.

The District shall offer opportunities for all staff to improve culturally responsive instructional practices, curriculum, and assessments competencies in serving our diverse student body and community to increase individual and collective capacity to effectively teach our diverse student population and serve diverse families. Practices, procedures and programs that result in over or under representation of any group of students compared to peers shall be subject to close review to assure that such results are due to meeting student legitimate educational, social or emotional needs. Practices that do not meet this close review shall be eliminated. Teachers, administrators and district staff shall collaborate to establish and implement culturally responsive [AH1] instructional practices, curriculum and assessments.

The District shall provide professional development to teaching staff specifically designed to strengthen employees' knowledge and skills for eliminating opportunity and achievement gaps between groups of students.

IV. RESPONSIBILITY

The Board of Directors shall consider the values stated in this policy in conducting its business and in exercising its responsibilities to the residents, families and students of the Mercer Island School District.

The Superintendent shall establish in accordance with this policy such plans and procedures as may be necessary and appropriate to accomplish its purpose and intent. Plans and procedures established shall include clear accountability for actions and oversight, and shall include metrics for evaluation.