More Success for More Students

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How to Build an Exemplary Equity Program

Shomari Jones

Director of Equity and Strategic Engagement
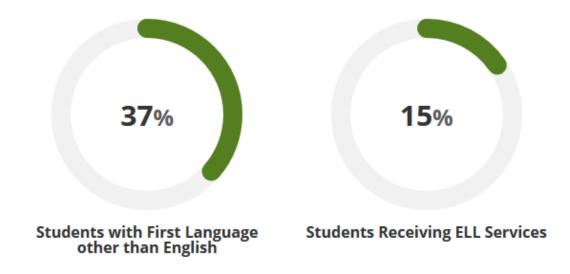
Bellevue School District

Mission

To serve each and every student academically, socially, and emotionally, through a rigorous and relevant education that is innovative and individualized. As a learning community that values one another's humanity, we provide courageous support for an equitable and exceptional education for all students.
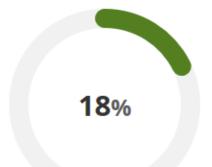
District Profile

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Bellevue School District

District enrollment: 20,262

Graduation rate: 91%

Special education students: 9%

More than 80 languages are spoken

37%
Students with First Language other than English

15%
Students Receiving ELL Services

18%
Students Who Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch

Let's take a poll!
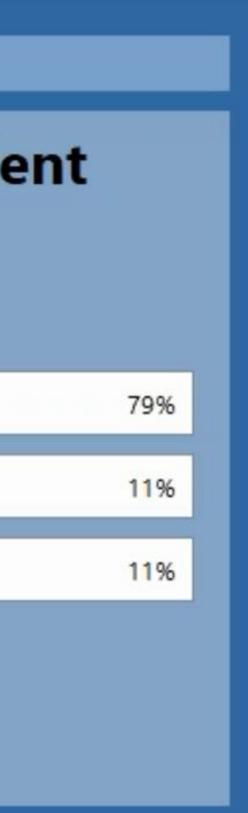
Equity Across the Nation

Lack of equity can be seen in gaps of student achievement, the most significant of which exist between underserved students and their peers.

Compared to an 84% national average, the graduation rates for underserved groups are:

- **78% and below for students of color**
- **78% for low-income students**
- **63% for students with disabilities**
- **62.6% for ELL students**

During the 2014–2015 school year, the adjusted cohort graduation rates (ACGRs) were:[1]

90% ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER

88% WHITE

78% HISPANIC

75% BLACK

72% AMERICAN INDIAN/ ALASKA NATIVE

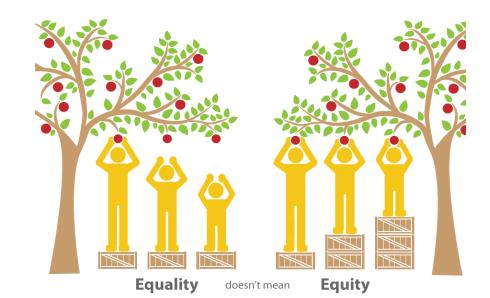# Lessons for Educators Interested in Accomplishing This Work

- **Identify Key Supports:** In this work, it's paramount to have buy-in from your organizational decision makers, and key stakeholders amongst your community, families, students and staff you serve. Consider the strength of a fist versus a finger. There is much more value in building a unified movement, inclusive of multiple perspectives.

- **Keep Students at the Center:** It's important to ensure that all students, with a focus on underserved and underrepresented youth and students of color, have equitable opportunities to succeed in school and thus it's critical to invite the voice OF students when making decisions FOR students.

- **Beware of Your Blind Spots:** Determine strategies to examine your individual bias and implicit associations that may unconsciously result in damage to the very groups (those that are traditionally marginalized and stereotyped) we're seeking to support. Set intentions and find accountability partners.

Purpose

Why Examine and Address Race?

Race matters – in society and in our schools. It is critical for educators to address racial issues in order to uncover personal and institutional biases that prevent all students, and especially students of color, from reaching their fullest potential.

Equality   doesn't mean   Equity

- **Align policies and practices** with our mission of achievement for each and every student.

- Identify and examine critical disparities in our educational system to ensure that **opportunities and supports exist for high achievement by each and every student** regardless of special needs, race, ethnicity, or financial status.

- Provide a **rigorous** (challenging academic environment) education for each and every student.

- Expect and support **relevant, culturally competent learning environments**.

Focus Areas for the Equity Department

- Launch & Assessment of **Culturally Relevant Teaching** (CRT) within the **Race in the US course** (Black and Brown History) in our comprehensive high schools and the revision of 8th grade social studies

- **Adult-focused** work on racial equity

- **STUDENT-focused** work on racial equity

- **Racial Equity Policy** Proposal

Accomplishments

- Parent Alliance of Black Scholars (PABS)
- Breaking Out Of the Margins (BOOM)
- Student Affinity Groups
- Launch of Race In America Class
- Bellevue Equity Action Team (BEAT)
- ALL Schools have E-Teams
- Black Staff Leadership Group
- Equity in hiring
- Equity Presentations at National Summit
- Action Teams For Partnership (ATP) in 12 Schools
- Latino staff and community advisory group
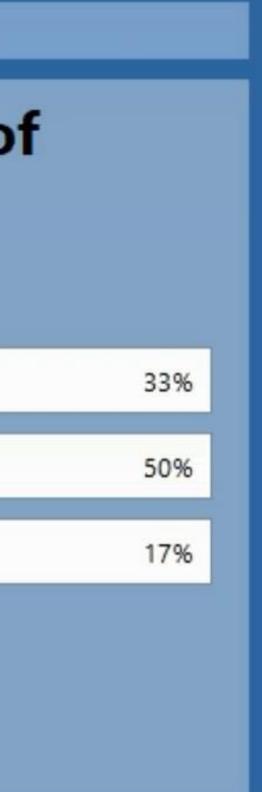
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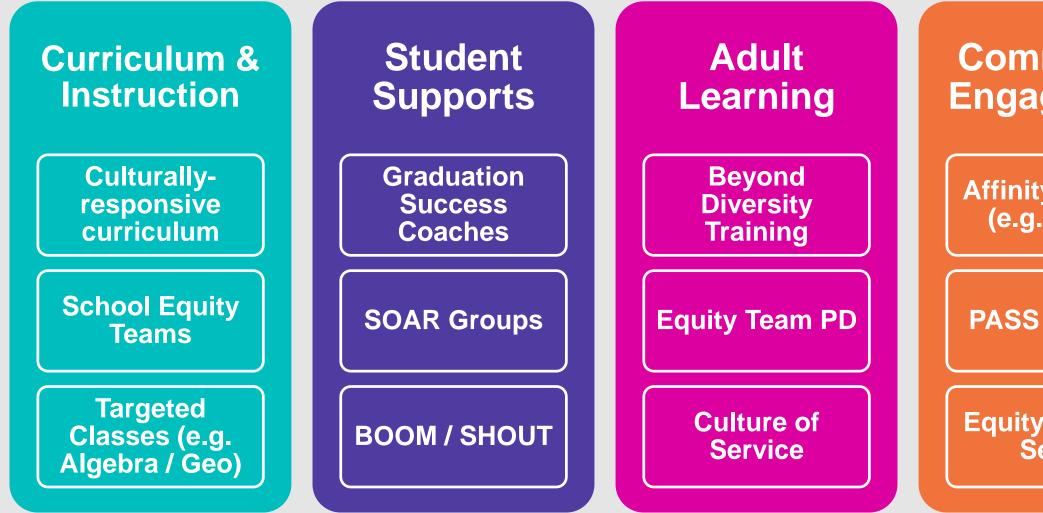
General Overview of Equity Work in BSD

Curriculum & Instruction	Student Supports	Adult Learning	Community Engagement
Culturally-responsive curriculum	Graduation Success Coaches	Beyond Diversity Training	Affinity Groups (e.g. PABS)
School Equity Teams	SOAR Groups	Equity Team PD	PASS Training
Targeted Classes (e.g. Algebra / Geo)	BOOM / SHOUT	Culture of Service	Equity Speaker Series

SOAR = Students Organized Against Racism
BOOM = Break Out of the Margin (student empowerment event focused on male students of color)
PABS = Parents of Black Scholars
SHOUT = Sistahs Having Outstanding Uniqueness Together (student empowerment event focused on female students of color)
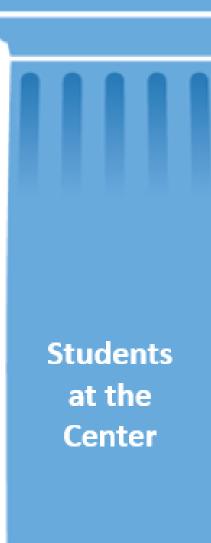PASS = Partnership for Academically Successful Students

In our highest aspiration of our work, what is it we are committed to achieving with regard to the impact of this work on ALL students, particularly our historically underserved groups of students of color?

Students at the Center

- S.O.A.R (Students Organized Against Racism)
- BOOM Pre & Post conference sessions
- SHOUT Pre & Post Conference Sessions
- Student Affinity Groups
- Asian affinity group to support Asian students
- Student led CCAR
- Poetry Slam Events
- Curriculum Development
  - English Lit
  - Race in the US Class
  - 8th Grade Social Studies
  - Open learning around oral tradition
  - Library SS curr revision with Judy Bordeaux
- BD1 4 all staff sessions
- Student Conferences outside of BSD
  - MECHA, LEAP, UW Gifted & Black, WSU VIBES

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In the highest aspiration of our work, what is it we are committed to achieving organizationally with regard to how we prepare leaders and educators to deliver powerful, culturally relevant learning environments across our system in a racially equitable manner?

Culturally Relevant Learning and Teaching

- Curriculum Development with cultural relevance
  - English Lit
  - Race in the US Class
  - 8th Grade Social Studies
  - Open learning around oral tradition
  - Library SS curr revision with Judy Bordeaux
- English Dept. PD Development
- Brown Bag Sessions
- PEG SpEll Training
- PEG Curriculum Training
- C&I PD Development & Facilitation
- School level PD Facilitation

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Equity Leadership Development

In our highest aspiration of our work, what is it we are committed to achieving with regard to systematizing powerful leadership for racial equity?

- White Male Affinity Group (WMA)
- DELT
- API Group
- Black Leadership Group
- Coaching visits with ES & ED's
- E-Team Development (28 schools)
- PEG Affiliates
- Brown Bag Intersession
- BEAT
- Equity Policy Development
- Regional & National Summit
- Equity Blog Space
- Quarterly Meetings with ED's
- PD Planning & Facilitation
- C&I Collaboration around Equity PD

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Family and Community Engagement and Empowerment

In the highest aspiration of our work, what is it we are committed to achieving with regard to how we equitably engage and empower our relationships with families and community members, particularly our historically underserved communities of color?

- LatinX Group
- PABS
- ATP
- BOOM & SHOUT Forums
- MLK Assembly
- Jubilee Reach PD Facilitation (BD1)
- API Group (parents included)
- Community Partnership Events

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Racial Equity Community Session Overview

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Overview

- 5 Sessions
- 2 Community Café style, 3 small group facilitated discussions
- Last two sessions had between 300 and 500 participants each

Purpose & Questions:

Purpose: To collect community feedback in order to inform a Racial and Educational Equity Policy
- What does "Racial Equity" mean to you?
- What does an equitable school district look like to you and what impact would it has on you and/or your student?
- What is your definition of equity vs equality?

Initial Analysis of the Sessions

What Went Well

- High turnout for the sessions demonstrates strong community interest in our schools, also allowed us to build a better understanding of needs, interests, and concerns
- Facilitators were helpful in keeping the discussions civil and ensuring all participants had a chance to share their views.
- The small group format, with timekeeping, worked well to ensure many perspectives were heard

Lessons Learned

- Clarity of purpose, role clarity, & definitions of key terms would be helpful
- Logistics – including space, staff support, materials, timing, location, communication – need to be finalized further in advance
- Issues anticipation & engagement with community leaders could surface concerns prior to the event
- Need to meet the community at their level of understanding of the issue
- Timing should reflect readiness, going too fast is detrimental

Key Challenges

- The format was not conducive to collecting the type of information we wanted (i.e. discussing sensitive topics in group discussions is problematic, open ended discussions around topics where there are misunderstandings or lack of clarity is problematic)
- We did not properly engage with our entire community to identify concerns or topics that caused anxiety prior to the session
- We did not have clear definitions of what we had done in the past around racial equity, how we were defining equity, or why racial equity
- We rushed to put together the sessions, so were unprepared

Possible Next Steps

- Put out clear communication – from both the district & the Board – that states what our equity work is focused on doing & what it is not doing; clear up any obvious misconceptions on the part of the community
- Use these sessions as a catalyst for further engaging with the community, both the voices heard at the forums and those not heard; identify leaders who can be part of small group discussions to better gauge concerns
- Clearly outline the equity work happening in BSD, including why race is important, what we mean by equity, what work are we doing specifically, clearly defining benefits & impacts for all students

Next Steps…

- Expand opportunities for BD1
- Develop consistent intersession opportunities
- Develop & support E-Team structure & theory of practice
- Develop student based leadership groups (SOAR)
- Engage community in racial equity work (PASS & CARE)
- Transparency of communication and information
- Inclusion and support for staff of color
- Develop methods for communicating within PLC's & district Leadership groups, etc.
- Develop quarterly E- Team Deep dive sessions for Leads training and consultancy protocol

Tools to Support Strategy

- Panorama Student Survey gathers feedback on student perception that is useful for highlighting the need for equity initiatives

- Graduation Success Counselors assign digital curriculum to help struggling students get back on track to graduate

Key Learnings

- Proper implementation and planning
- Effectively address the existing culture to enhance learning opportunities
- Be strategic in the selection of digital curriculum
- Provide ongoing, personalized professional development
- Provide leadership as you gain buy-in and consensus for your equity efforts

Questions / Comments / Feedback

For additional information regarding this presentation contact:

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Questions?

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