

# EXCELLENCE THROUGH EQUITY

## NYACK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### ***BUILDING BRIDGES FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS TO CROSS INTO TOMORROW'S WORLD WITH EQUITY, INNOVATION & OPTIMISM***

#### **OUR EQUITY VISION**

The Nyack Public Schools value the richness of our diverse community. This assertion is founded in the Board of Education's Mission Statement approved in its policies. We believe that each child is born with sufficient innate ability to achieve school tasks and that it is our ethical and moral responsibility to ensure our school district provides an optimal learning environment that meets the needs of all students regardless of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, first language, religion, national origin, age or physical appearance.

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Nyack Public Schools is to provide each student with programs of excellence that instill a passion for learning while preparing them for the challenges of an increasingly complex world. The Nyack Public Schools will enhance each student's self-esteem, help them discover and maximize their individual potential, and guide each to dignify, appreciate, respect, and accept human diversity.

#### **EQUITY GOAL**

The Nyack Public School District's equity goal is to create a District-wide and building-based climate and culture that demands and supports systemic equity and improved student achievement for *each* student while narrowing the predictable racial achievement gap.

#### **BACKGROUND**

During the 2015-16 school year, the District engaged in a comprehensive process to examine its current instructional practices and programs against the competencies and skills perceived to be required for our students to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our focus was intended to better understand the competencies young people will need to succeed in the new global economy and determine if our current educational program is able to provide students with that skill set. *"Our schools are not failing, as many claim; rather they are obsolete. We continue to focus far too much time on teaching and testing content knowledge that can be retrieved from the Internet as needed. Knowledge has become a free commodity, like air, so the world no longer cares how much our students know. What the world cares about-what matters most-is what our students can do with what they know"* (Tony Wagner, *Most Likely to Succeed*, 2015). In building a new "Profile of a Nyack High School Graduate" two essential questions emerged:

- How well are we preparing our students for a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world?
- How well are we meeting the needs of *all* Nyack students?

Through an extensive process of reflection, research and community engagement; the district developed seven (7) core 'C' competencies believed to be most important for a Nyack High School graduate: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, compassion/empathy, content mastery, and cultural/global awareness. These competencies are embedded in the Board of Education's Mission Statement (Policy #0050) and have become central to work that we do on a daily basis. Our vision defines our purpose as a district and defines what our schools will need to look like if each of our students is to succeed in life, citizenship, and work. Although we still have a long way to go to effectively implement needed structural changes within historically racist and classist institutions of public education, truly embodying an unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion must take center stage. The District recognizes that major historical and societal factors in our nation impact the inequity that exists within public schools. Purposeful action can be taken to identify, acknowledge, and overcome racial and ethnic disparities between students. The responsibility for addressing these disparities among students rests with the adults, not with the students.

### **STATEMENT OF BELIEFS**

- **WE BELIEVE** the rich history and culture of the Nyack School/community is a source of pride and an asset to embrace and celebrate.
- **WE BELIEVE** a strength of the Nyack Public Schools is our expanding, racially, and culturally diverse population.
- **WE BELIEVE** that each student has the ability to learn and that we have an ethical and moral responsibility to ensure an educational system that provides optimum learning environments that lead students to be prepared for their individual futures.
- **WE BELIEVE** that any achievement gap between white students and students of color (historically defined as black or African Americans, Africans, Native Americans /Indigenous or Alaska natives, Asians, Latinx students, native Hawaiian, or Pacific islanders) is unacceptable.
- **WE BELIEVE** that speaking a language other than English is an asset and that our education system must celebrate and enhance this ability alongside appropriate and culturally responsive support for English Language Learners.
- **WE BELIEVE** students receiving special education services are an integral part of our educational responsibility and we must welcome the opportunity to be inclusive, make appropriate accommodations, and celebrate their assets. We must directly address the over-representation of students of color in special education and the under-representation in advanced instructional programs.
- **WE BELIEVE** that our community, parents, teachers, and community-based organizations have unique and important solutions to improving outcomes for our students and our schools. Our work will only be successful if we are able to truly partner with the community, engage with respect, authentically listen, and have the courage to share decision making.

- **WE BELIEVE** that lasting culture change can only occur when low expectations are eliminated and through ongoing dialogue and self-reflection about privilege and power.
- **WE BELIEVE** in the importance of supporting great teaching. Research is clear that teachers are among the most powerful influences in student learning. An equitable educational system requires providing teachers with the tools and support to meet the needs of all students (Hattie, J.; 2009).

## **EQUITY PLAN MILESTONE MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

As a result of implementing our Equity Plan and accomplishing each objective, Nyack Public Schools will significantly improve achievement outcomes for students of color as measured by the Milestones Framework.

- **EACH STUDENT** will enter **Kindergarten** ready to learn and **First Grade** ready to read.
- **EACH STUDENT** will be reading on grade level at the end of **Third Grade**.
- **EACH STUDENT** will complete **Grade 8** ready for high school.
- **EACH STUDENT** will enter **Grade 10** on track to graduate high school.
- **EACH STUDENT** will complete **Grade 12 ON TIME** prepared for college & the workforce.

## **EQUITY FOCUS AREAS**

To achieve our *Milestone Measures of Success* the Nyack Public Schools has identified four key areas or pillars that require significant investment and attention in order to eliminate the racial predictability and disproportionality between white students and students of color. Our students, staff, and stakeholders bring their personal backgrounds and identities into our schools each day, and creating welcoming and equitable spaces for all is paramount to the success of the Nyack Public Schools. While the District believes addressing racial inequities within the District’s culture and in all areas of operation is a priority, we also recognize how developing an effective equity lens will positively impact all students, staff, and stakeholders who may be marginalized due to race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, first language, religion, national origin, age or physical appearance. Through our Equity Plan we intend to address the culture that impacts our students and staff, examine the ways we engage members of our community; address the curriculum that guides the learning in our classrooms, and make a conscious effort to represent a variety of cultures reflecting the diverse stories and histories of all students; address the instructional practices of our staff; and focus on research-based instructional strategies designed to meet the academic needs of all students.

### **PILLAR I**

#### **CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE WORKFORCE**

By ‘cultural responsiveness’ Nyack Public Schools means “the knowledge, beliefs, skills, attitudes, and practices that allow individuals to form relationships and create learning environments that support academic achievement and personal development of learners from diverse racial and cultural groups.”

***We believe:***

- If every employee is racially conscious and culturally responsive, then every staff member will exhibit the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices to interrupt institutional racism and better meet the unique needs of students, families, and staff of color.
- If employees become more aware of how their own cultural biases and privileges may influence their judgments and actions towards student performance, and create barriers for student access to key learning opportunities, then disparities in student outcomes will be reduced.
- If our workforce has knowledge of and respect for the various cultural traditions and languages of students in their classrooms; and has socio-cultural knowledge about child and adolescent development; and about the ways that race, class, language and culture shape school performance, then disparities in student outcomes will be reduced.
- If our workforce mirrors the students and families we serve, then our organization will be better able to provide role models for student of color, better understand the needs of our students and families of color, and make better decisions for our families and students of color. (NBEC, “The Long Term Impacts of Same Race Teachers”)

**STRATEGIES:**

1. Provide professional learning communities (roundtables, book studies, webinars, discussion groups) and other professional development structures (e.g. Nyack Professional Academy) to address implicit bias and microaggressions, develop racial literacy, and assist employees in understanding racism as a dehumanizing ideology that is the single most critical barrier to developing a school district that is equitable to all students.
2. Provide professional development focused on the impact of holding high expectations for all students.
3. Provide an Equity Certification In-Service Credit Program offered to all district teachers.
4. Encourage employee participation in monthly Undoing Racism Roundtable sessions as each of the District’s school buildings facilitated by the Board of Education approved UDR facilitators.
5. Identify and recognize instructional methods that high-performing, culturally responsive teachers are using both cross-curricular, and across the District. Facilitate cross-district partnerships and inter-school visits that target particular instructional strategies and purposefully partner teachers.
6. Partner with higher education institutions to identify research-based, instructional strategies that are most effective in advancing student academic success.
7. New teacher orientation programs and mentoring will integrate new staff into the ongoing equity, diversity, and anti-bias/anti-racist teaching practices.
8. Assess the physical environment of our schools and classrooms (e.g. Tripod DEI Survey) to determine that students’ cultures, languages, and identities are reflected, represented, and valued.
9. Assess student perceptions of teaching quality in our classrooms (e.g. Tripod 7C’s Framework of Effective Teaching and Support) focusing on personal, curricular, and

academic supports to assist our staff in building rapport and developing the positive relationships necessary for achieving excellence through racial equity.

10. Require that all interviews and screenings and working committees reflect the diversity of our students and the communities that we serve.
11. Develop partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities as well as colleges and universities with diverse teacher prep programs (including Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Asian students) to target recruitment and hiring initiatives.
12. Develop processes and procedures during candidate screenings that include questions and scenarios related to race, equity and diversity;
13. Create an exit survey specifically for transitioning staff that explicitly collects data regarding hiring practices and district culture.

## **PILLAR II**

### **CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING & LEARNING**

In order for the District to achieve excellence through equity, we must provide students of color with rigorous, culturally responsive, and engaging learning environments that accelerate their academic achievement and personal growth.

#### ***We believe:***

- If we provide students of color with equitable access to courses and high-quality teachers who demonstrate anti-racist, culturally responsive instructional practices, students will achieve academic and personal success.
- If we enroll emerging bilingual students in effective dual-language programs, they will experience increased academic and personal success while preserving their native language, cultural identity, and cultural heritage.
- If we provide school leadership (Principals, APs, Deans) with professional development in culturally responsive behavior support systems, then referral rates for exclusionary discipline will decrease significantly for students of color.

#### **STRATEGIES:**

1. Establish curriculum teams responsible for reviewing curriculums and revising instructional units to ensure our curriculums are culturally responsive; embed opportunities for students to understand, explore, and critique equity-focused disparities; and seek collaboration with community resources to provide supplemental learning opportunities.
2. Adopt curriculums that include culturally authentic learning experiences that mirror students' ways of learning, knowing, reading, understanding, communicating and demonstrating curiosity and knowledge. The curriculums should include and highlight contributions and texts more reflective of the diverse identities of students and limit, reframe, and minimize the monocultural framework that privileges the historically advantaged at the expense of other groups.
3. Employ a critical lens (race, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, religion, ability, socioeconomic status, or other salient cultural identities) when analyzing,

- reviewing, and revising curriculum frameworks to address the de-centering of dominant ideologies and pedagogies that ignore or marginalize students.
4. Create courses and units of study that are specific to learning about diverse cultures represented in the state of New York (e.g. Latinx studies, African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Gender Studies, Indigenous Studies, LGBTQ?) comprehensively (e.g. not relegated to a specific month or chapter) and empowering (e.g. African American history does not begin with slavery but with African history).
  5. Library/Media Centers will emphasize a perspective of inclusion by including materials that address the issues of multicultural/anti-racism education.
  6. Analyze outcome data disparities across race, gender, students who are differently-abled, identify as LGBTQ or non-binary? English Learners, and free or reduced lunch recipients. Strategize instructional methods through the development of equity action plans to disrupt any disparities in student success outcomes that exist across differences including but not limited to disciplinary disparities and Special Education referrals.
  7. Develop school-based equity teams to address instructional rigor, cultural responsiveness, achievement disparities, and student engagement.
  8. Provide opportunities for more underrepresented students to access advanced level classes. The District shall examine disaggregated enrollment data annually to ensure no inequitable impact or determine where there is an inequitable impact?
  9. Improve student-teacher relationships in order to foster student interest in curricular and extracurricular activities (7C's Framework of Effective Teaching, PBIS).
  10. Provide regular opportunities for culturally responsive social-emotional learning within lessons as discrete learning activities.
  11. Implement trauma-informed, restorative justice principles of school discipline in all schools to include restorative circles to welcome students back into learning when harm has occurred.
  12. Develop a Suspension Alternative Program housed at the Administration Building and staffed with professionals trained in restorative discipline principles and exhibit the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices to interrupt institutional racism.

### **PILLAR III**

## **CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

In order for the District to achieve excellence through racial equity, we must empower both families and communities of color to advocate for their children and give them meaningful access to both school-and district-level decision-making.

#### ***We believe:***

- If we engage parents and caregivers in learning research-based strategies from birth to age three, then the gaps between socio-economic, racial, and ethnic groups will decrease when the community's children enter kindergarten.

- If every school develops a parent engagement plan which focuses on connecting families of color to the instructional goals of their school, there will be an increase in the number of culturally specific family engagement opportunities at each school and ultimately, increased engagement with families of color.
- If we provide families of color with equitable access to school and district information and practices, they will be empowered to better navigate the system, advocate for their children, and support the academic and personal success of their children.

**STRATEGIES:**

1. Parents/guardians that reflect the diversity of our students will be encouraged to participate in parent leadership roles in the schools/district.
2. Each school will take an active role in recruiting parent/guardian leadership representing the diversity of our students.
3. Each school will create communication links between the school and home to ensure that everyone is able to access information.
4. Be aware of the need to disseminate all communications in the preferred language and format desired.
5. Provide supports for our Family Resource Centers to address the varying levels of needs for physical and emotional security (e.g. dwelling, food, clothing, etc.) and remediating those immediate needs as a priority so that students can be successful.
6. Leverage the knowledge of other parents to create strong parental in-school communities.
7. Work with the PTAs to ensure that the parents are represented in the school across various identities including race, family orientation, social class, and religious background.
8. Parent/guardian assistance in understanding values and culture diversity will be solicited.
9. Develop multiple engagement systems (e.g. holding meetings at different hours, providing transportation and childcare, using parent apps, etc.) to expand access to and communication with families of diverse backgrounds.
10. Provide translators, where possible, at all levels of family and community engagement within the District, including the enrollment process, processing parental concerns, and addressing efforts to seek support.
11. Routinely implement strategies to solicit and incorporate the voices of under-served students, their parents, and their teachers in determination and evaluation of student progress and the appropriateness of PTA/School activities.
12. Create, cultivate, and sustain welcoming environments that reflect and support the diversity of school, home and community.

**PILLAR IV**

**CULTURAL & ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION**

In order for the District to achieve excellence through equity, our system must undergo a cultural and organizational transformation to build a culture of inclusion, acceptance and empowerment – one that actively challenges institutional racism. The Board of Education and

Leadership Team must actively examine and dismantle systemic policies, programs and practices that serve to perpetuate racial achievement disparities.

***We believe:***

- If goals at every level in the District are based on data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, there will be increased accountability for meeting the needs of students of color.
- If we apply a racial equity lens to key policies, programs, practices and decisions with an intentional focus on ‘equal outcomes’ rather than ‘equal inputs’ – students and families of color will experience more equitable outcomes.
- If we adopt culturally relevant and research practices, we will be able to more accurately represent, assess and evaluate the needs and behaviors of students and families of color.

**STRATEGIES:**

1. Student data across areas of discipline, academic achievement, on-time graduation rates, special education referrals and advanced courses of study will be collected annually, then disaggregated, analyzed and used in the development of equity action plans as part of our ongoing practice.
2. An equity lens will be used in developing all areas of teaching, learning, program development and institutional practices.
3. The Cycle of Inquiry Framework will be used at each school level through building-level equity teams and equity action plans developed annually through building-level student data analysis.
4. The District will conduct periodic review of school policies (e.g. code of conduct) with regard to sociocultural responsiveness, diversity and inclusion.
5. School culture and classroom environments will reflect sensitivity to and celebration of the diverse student population.
6. The District will assess school climate using a variety of measures to collect diverse stakeholders perceptions and experiences.
7. The District will encourage diversity in the membership of all district-level and building-level committees including personnel interview committees.
8. The District will continue to search for and remove barriers for student groups, particularly students of diverse backgrounds, to ensure they have access to the most rigorous course available.

**FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING CAPACITY WITHIN OUR SCHOOLS**

The framework for building capacity within the school district is built upon a Theory of Action, a cyclical process beginning with awareness building followed by acknowledgement (goal setting) and action. The process is based upon the following:

1. Build capacity of district leaders, school administrators, teachers and support staff to:
  - Understand how and why inequities exist and their outcomes.

- Implement strategies to turn disparities in outcome patterns and trends around.
  - Develop skills and capacity to respond to student needs in culturally appropriate and responsive ways.
  - Develop high academic expectations for each student.
  - Design and implement more culturally responsive programs and structures.
  - Build internal accountability.
2. Establish building-based equity teams at each school to provide equity-focused leadership to district and school planning efforts.
  3. Increase the impact of equity-driven practices in everyday district, school and classroom activity.
  4. As a result, the following achievement and participation patterns will occur:
    - Academic achievement will improve across all schools.
    - Steady and significant progress will be made in closing the achievement gap and achieving group proportionality in areas of academic (e.g. Honors, Advanced Placement courses), discipline, special education, and on-time graduation.
  5. Cycles of Inquiry that deepen an understanding of patterns of achievement and inequities will be used to support and monitor the progress toward meeting our equity objectives.

### **CYCLE OF INQUIRY**

**Utilize the Cycle of Inquiry Framework (Theory of Practice) at each building through building level equity teams to develop Action Plans based upon individual school level data.**

#### *REVIEW DISPROPORTIONALITY DATA*

*Is it working?*

*Is there a problem?*

*ACTION PLAN*

*AWARENESS of CHALLENGE*

*How should we progress?*

*What should we do?*

#### *INQUIRY PLAN*