



MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Greg Baker, Superintendent
DATE: January 7, 2021
SUBJECT: Monitoring Report for EL-10, Race and Equity

I certify that the following is accurate as of January 7, 2021. The reporting period is from the completion date of the last report this Executive Limitation (October 6, 2019) to present. The report includes updates on work instituted prior to the reporting period to provide evidence of ongoing progress on work in this area, as well as priority areas for our work for the reporting period and beyond.

Policy Type: Executive Limitation
Policy: EL-10 Race and Equity (copy attached)
Adopted: August 14, 2019

Background Information: This report is about Executive Limitation (EL)-10 Race and Equity. EL-10 states that, “The superintendent shall not fail to interrupt factors that perpetuate systemic inequities and/or practices that contribute to over and under representation of any student group compared to peers. The superintendent shall confront the institutional bias that results in predictability of student success or lack thereof, including but not limited to race and ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, language and culture.”

By way of review, overarching evidence of work in service of this broad statement include the refinement and revision to our district’s strategic plan, *The Bellingham Promise*, to include a sixth strategy focused specifically on elevating our work in equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This revision, adopted by the board, was the result of months of community, staff and student engagement that provided opportunities for input and feedback on drafts of the actual adopted language in the strategic plan. Simultaneously, the school district’s board of directors worked to develop this Executive Limitation, that puts a higher emphasis and specific guidance focused on issues of race and equity into the process of evaluating the superintendent’s success.

1. The superintendent shall not fail to take all reasonable and prudent actions with respect to reporting, processing and tracking incidents of bias that are typical for similar and highly effective organizations.

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff have demonstrated reasonable efforts to implement processes for reporting, processing, tracking and resolving incidents of bias, racism or hate speech of other kinds that occur.

Evidence of Compliance:

- Under the direction of the Department of Teaching and Learning, the district is in the process of building a response system for dealing with incidents of bias, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-LGBTQ, as well as any other incidents of hate speech or bias. Schools are engaged in efforts to respond to incidents of hate speech or bias regarding race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or other forms of discrimination, and to continue to analyze and learn from these types of issues in our schools and how they are resolved.
- These efforts have continued into the COVID-19 period, with follow up around incidents that have occurred in the remote learning environment (on Zoom and Teams calls). Our new Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (see below) is actively involved in supporting responses to incidents. As well, we continue to engage a community-based consultant, Malcolm Oliver, to assist with our response efforts.
- Concurrently we have followed up to establish a mobile response team that can support staff, students and families when incidents of bias, racism, anti-LGBTQ or anti-Semitic actions occur.

2a. The superintendent shall not fail to recruit, employ, support, retain and continuously develop a workforce of culturally responsive staff.

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff have demonstrated reasonable efforts to continuously work to diversify the district's staff through recruitment, support and retention strategies.

Evidence of Compliance:

- Since the writing of the last report, the district has recruited and hired a new Director for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Dr. Janis Velasquez Farmer, to oversee and continue to develop our efforts in EDI. Dr. Velasquez Farmer brings a wealth of experience and expertise that will be vital for continuing to grow our efforts in these areas.
- The district's Human Resources department tracks hiring of ethnic minority candidates annually, and the most recent [report](#) shows that, for the hiring year ending in May of 2019, 15.2% of certificated hires were people identified as having ethnic minority status. This percentage was the highest for any year since 2013.
- District leaders have organized an affinity group meeting on a regular basis to provide support for our staff members who are people of color. This group is actively up and running now.
- The district has added new people resources in the area of mental health, including Mental Health Coordinator Chris Cochran who, in addition to providing direct help to Bellingham students and families, also is providing oversight and coordination support with our various community mental health partners. In addition, we have recently added some additional school-based mental health

specialist support, focused both on supporting students receiving special education services, as well as general education students.

2b. The superintendent shall not fail to increase workforce diversity reflective of our students.

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff have demonstrated reasonable efforts to continuously work to diversify the district's workforce in ways that more robustly reflect the diversity of our student population.

Evidence of Compliance:

- Our Human Resources department's continual work to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce.
- Continuing into its fourth year, our high school Teacher Academy program aims to support students beginning their journey to becoming a teacher, specifically working to recruit and attract interested students of color into this pathway.
- Internship opportunities continued for students of color from the Social Service program at Western Washington University with our district's Family Engagement team.

2c. The superintendent shall not fail to seek out and incorporate student voice in order to develop and maintain a safe and inclusive environment for each and every student.

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff have demonstrated reasonable efforts to continuously work to engage student voices, and in particular the voices of students who reflect the diversity of our community.

Evidence of Compliance:

- The importance of seeking out opportunities to hear from and support the whole range of students and families has taken on added significance during the COVID-19 crisis. Statistics tell the story that minority populations are at higher risk for getting COVID-19, and this adds stress to families who may already be struggling to keep their kids connected to schools. Some of this work has involved intentionally seeking out and supporting families with limited or zero technology access available in their homes, working with community partners to provide that access and ensure that every Bellingham student could access online learning options.
- District staff, including members of our technology team led by Executive Director Kurt Gazow, moved quickly this fall (September 2020) to ensure that all students were provided with a computer device. This effort included those students in the early grades of kindergarten through second grade, which meant speeding up the implementation of the 1:1 computing initiative at those grade levels.
- The superintendent's Student Advisory Committee includes two representatives from each of our four high schools who meet monthly with the superintendent to discuss issues and provide feedback. We have also included student voices, including students of color, in the re-opening schools committee and subcommittees established over the course of last spring and summer.
- The ongoing community conversation about police in schools has included opportunities to engage with students, and particularly students of color, to learn their perspectives about police presence in our schools.

2d. The superintendent shall not fail to engage families and community partners in culturally appropriate ways to ensure multiple cultural perspectives are elevated and valued.

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff have demonstrated reasonable efforts to continuously work to engage families and community partners who represent the diversity of our students in culturally appropriate and relevant ways.

Evidence of Compliance:

- We sent messages to the entire Bellingham community late last school year ([May 31](#) and [June 3](#)) that emphasized our continued work with Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and included statements on our district's effort to become a more anti-racist organization. These statements were met with hundreds of emails, social media comments and phone calls about our efforts in this area, each of which we responded to personally.
- The addition of new people resources to the Family Engagement team led by Executive Director Isabel Meaker has occurred. As a result, district-wide family engagement has increased during the course of the pandemic and we have been able to provide the translation and interpretation needed to support that increase. Team members have been reassigned and every school has a point person to support the engagement with families regardless of the home language. Consistent with our district's Language Access Policy (4218) the poster shown below is displayed now at all our schools and the district office, informing parents about their rights to translation and interpretation.



Messages from the district have been translated into Spanish, Vietnamese, Punjabi and Russian. This service has made an incredible difference in the participation of parents in schools that historically have struggled to make connections with schools.

- In addition, the support of the Family Engagement team to literally go family by family, home by home, to ensure that all Bellingham families have access to needed resources has been redoubled during this recent period of the pandemic. Ongoing work by the team to support diverse families has included sustained provision of culturally appropriate food options. This effort is unique in our community. The Family Engagement team supports basic needs of families in need accessed through the Family Support Fund (Bellingham Public Schools Foundation) and other community partners. The team uses these funds to buy beds, sheets and other furniture, as well as utilizing donations from various community partners for personal care items, blankets, rent/utility support and ongoing food needs.
- For a period of several months this past spring and summer, the district engaged in partnership with the Light House Mission to house their drop-in center for people who are homeless on campus at Bellingham High School.

- Signage we have encouraged, mandated, allowed in schools also promotes equity, diversity and inclusion. An example is the sign entitled “Joining Hands Against Hate” (see below) developed in partnership with the Whatcom Human Rights Task Force that is now displayed in all our schools and district sites.



- Our Food Services team, led by Executive Director Jessica Sankey and Executive Chef Patrick Durgan, has stepped up throughout the recent pandemic to ensure that food options are available to ALL Bellingham Public School families. This effort has included the provision of weekly food boxes, pre-packed and delivered at school sites for families to pick up each week. In addition, the partnership with the Bellingham Food Bank for weekly food distribution from two school sites continued, as did meal delivery to neighborhoods in our community in greatest need.

2e. The superintendent shall not fail to provide an environment that supports the creation and implementation of culturally responsive instructional practices and curriculum.

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff have demonstrated reasonable efforts to continuously work to seek out, identify, adopt and develop culturally responsive curricula and instructional practices.

Evidence of Compliance:

- Efforts to ensure a robust online learning experience for all students during the COVID-19 period have included continued attention to standards-based instructional planning across the grade levels, so that all students are taught standards-based lessons in the remote environment. In some cases, this effort asked teachers to revisit and reconsider which standards are most crucial for students they teach, and to make these a strong focus in the instructional process delivered online.
- Bellingham teachers have stepped up attention to issues of racial equity and justice in their instructional process, responding in part to the expression of community need and concern related to a heightened societal focus on racial disparities. The centrality of a focus on equity was a significant part of the planning effort that led up to the reopening of school this fall, with over 300 teachers engaged in supporting retooled curriculum and instructional practices geared for the online environment throughout July and August of 2020.
- A summer school opportunity serving our migrant student population was held in partnership with community partner, Vamos Outdoor Education Project. This effort was held mainly in outdoor settings and was well attended and viewed as very successful.
- The new Ethnic Studies course was co-developed and offered for the first time in Bellingham’s high schools, in partnership with faculty members from Western Washington University.

- Bias checks continue to occur in all curriculum adoptions to ensure that a broad representation of students/families is observed in any curricular materials adoption.
- Professional development on culturally responsive teaching practices, relying on the work of Zaretta Hammond, continued in several schools, with plans to further develop staff around the use of these perspectives.
- Use of the UWCEL 5D instructional framework, which is the basis of our teacher evaluation model, to coach and develop culturally responsive practices.

2f. The superintendent shall not fail to provide professional development, training and engagement opportunities to inform and practice cultural competence and increase awareness of personal bias and inequities in leading, teaching, counseling, advising and coaching practices.

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff have demonstrated reasonable efforts to continuously work to increase the awareness of personal bias and inequities, including the continuation of ongoing efforts to inform and practice cultural competence among our system's leaders, teachers, counselors, teacher leaders and classified staff members.

Evidence of Compliance:

- COVID-19 responses included specific instructional planning efforts highlighting and emphasizing diversity and equity issues. Planners included members of the Department of Teaching Learning team, a core group of educational technology coaches and district TOSAs, and over 300 teacher volunteers who came together in July and August to gear up for the re-opening of school. Throughout these efforts, we specifically emphasized family engagement as a crucial strategy to help families with navigating online learning resources, food, supplies and other crucial supports to assist them throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As noted earlier, we are continuing efforts to improve our staff professional learning with opportunities to increase culturally responsive practices and anti-racist practices. This includes, for example, school staff book studies focused on Zaretta Hammond's book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, as well as the use of these ideas in helping to guide planning for instruction in the online setting.
- Our leadership team and many of our staff districtwide have engaged in professional development, reading books and incorporating what they learn into their schools and worksites. Some staff engaged in summer reading groups and other professional development related to EDI. This is ongoing work, and we include it here to acknowledge the importance of continued learning in this area. Below are some titles that have become common reads amongst groups.
 - *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* by Zaretta Hammond
 - *How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi
 - *Waking Up White: and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* by Debby Irving
 - *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin J. DiAngelo
- We once again engaged Dr. Anthony Craig from the University of Washington to help support the development and implementation of learning around our EDI work with the leadership team during the 19-20 school year. The example of work accomplished by Dr. Craig and his team at the Tulalip-Quilceda School in the Marysville School District provided a powerful "existence proof"

of a school that took seriously issues of equity, diversity and inclusion, and was shared at an early leadership meeting last fall (2019).

- Department of Teaching and Learning work teams for 2019-20 included a clear focus on continuing to move our equity, diversity and inclusion work further into schools and classrooms.
- On the topic of supporting mental health education, all staff, families and community members were invited to take part in a free online training on suicide prevention, which was provided in partnership with Whatcom Family Community Network and M.A.D.-H.O.P.E. Youth Suicide Prevention Program, with funding provided by the Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA). This training aligns with the mental health aspects of our Bellingham Public Schools Big 4 for Wellness areas: mental and emotional health, physical activity, social connection and reflection.

2g. The superintendent shall not fail to recognize and value the funds of knowledge that students and families bring to each classroom, school and our system as a whole.

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff have demonstrated reasonable efforts to continuously work to celebrate and highlight the value of diverse perspectives and the funds of knowledge that students with diverse backgrounds bring to our schools every day.

Evidence of Compliance:

- The district's Communications office shares a monthly listing of major religious holidays via email to all district staff to improve awareness and sensitivity.
- Over the past couple of years, PTA leaders in our district in collaboration with the Bellingham Public Schools Foundation started an initiative known as the [Elementary Equity Pilot](#) project. The effort invited elementary parent groups to continue their individual school-based fundraising events and efforts then share ten percent to a cross-district "equity fund." Funds are shared with all participating parent groups based on the number of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch at each school site. This project acknowledges that each school has children in need and puts a greater emphasis on the schools with higher needs.

Statement of Compliance: The superintendent is **in compliance** with EL-10 Race and Equity.