STRATEGIC PLAN FOR EXCELLENCE THROUGH RACIAL EQUITY

NYACK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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

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 all children are 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 differently-abled.

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.

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 *every* student while narrowing the predictable gap in measurable outcomes.

BACKGROUND

The Nyack Public School District's history, demography and diversity enable a unique perspective—one that has propelled the school community into a challenging trajectory and investigation of the impact of systemic racism on student success. Twenty years ago, an intentional grassroots journey began when an independent consultant firm hired by the Board of Education conducted a study of systemic inequities that resulted in public reporting and focus group discussions within our community. The Tulin Report, as it became known, recommended district-wide training with The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond—called Undoing Racism—and initiated a wider response to collectively address disparate outcomes among students while organizing around racial justice.

Another milestone was placed during the 2015-16 school year, when 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 21st 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 Core 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 our daily work.

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 disparities in outcomes between students. **The responsibility for addressing these disparities among students rests with the adults, not with the students: This plan is about fixing the system, NOT fixing kids.**

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 everyone 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 opportunity gap between white students and BIPOC students (historically defined as Black or African Americans, Native Americans or Alaska natives, Asian, Latinx, 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 overrepresentation of students of color in special education and the under-representation of students of color 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.
- **WE BELIEVE** 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 and power among community stakeholders.
- **WE BELIEVE** that Nyack Public Schools will only achieve lasting systems change—as well as a change in school climate—by raising expectations and engaging in 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).

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 all students as measured by the Milestones Framework.

- **ALL STUDENTS** will enter **Kindergarten** ready to learn and **First Grade** ready to read.
- **ALL STUDENTS** will be reading on grade level at the end of **Third Grade**.
- **ALL STUDENTS** will complete **Grade 8** ready for high school.
- **ALL STUDENTS** will enter **Grade 10** on track to graduate high school.
- **ALL STUDENTS** will complete **Grade 12** ON TIME and are ready for college, vocational school and/or the workforce.

FOCUS AREAS

To achieve our *Milestone Measures of Success,* Nyack Public Schools has identified four key areas or pillars that require significant investment and attention in order to eliminate racial predictability and disproportionality. 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 that 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 the pillars of this Plan for Racial Equity, Nyack Public Schools will: 1) Address the culture that impacts our students and staff while examining the ways in which we engage members of our community. 2) Address the curriculum that guides the learning in our classrooms, making a conscious effort to represent a variety of cultures reflecting the diverse stories and histories of all students. 3) Address the instructional practices of our staff, focusing on research-based instructional strategies designed to meet the academic needs of all students. 4) Commit to engagement of all district families and cross-sector collaboration with community organizations that serve our families as we reach towards becoming an anti-racist, multicultural educational institution within our school community.

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 all students, families and staff.
- 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 every employee is provided with a common analysis and language that is endorsed by the Board of Education—so that all employees can develop a racial equity lens— then a collective understanding and commitment to systemic change will develop and deepen, encouraging sustainable systemic changes in policies, protocols and practices.
- If our workforce has knowledge of and respect for the various cultural traditions and languages of students in their classrooms, socio-cultural knowledge about child and adolescent development, and an understanding of 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 students, better understand the needs of our students and families, and make better decisions for our families and students of color. According to a 2018 working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, "Black students who are exposed to one black teacher by third grade were 13 percent more likely to enroll in college. Those who had two black teachers were 32 percent more likely to enroll in college."

STRATEGIES:

1. Provide professional learning communities (roundtables, book studies, webinars, discussion groups) and other professional development structures (e.g. Nyack Professional Academy) to address both systemic racism and its manifestations—such as implicit bias and microaggressions— develop racial literacy, and assist employees in understanding racism as a dehumanizing ideology and 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 (e.g. growth mindset).
3. Provide an Equity Certification In-Service Credit Program offered to all District teachers.
4. Encourage employee participation in monthly Courageous Conversations at each of the District's school buildings, facilitated by Board of Education-approved facilitators.
5. Identify and recognize instructional methods that high-performing, culturally responsive teachers are using, across departments and around the District. Facilitate cross-District partnerships and inter-school visits that target particular instructional strategies and purposefully partner teachers.
6. Partner with higher education and the Nyack Teacher's Center to identify the research based, instructional strategies most effective in advancing equity in academic outcomes
7. Integrate new staff into ongoing equity, diversity and anti-racist teaching practices through new-teacher orientation programs and mentoring. Assess the physical environment of our schools and classrooms (e.g. Tripod DEI Survey) to determine whether all students' cultures, languages and identities are reflected, represented and valued.
8. 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 developing the positive relationships that are necessary for achieving excellence with equity.
9. Require that all interview and screening committees reflect the diversity of our students and the communities that we serve by creating a district-wide hiring committee and providing training to members of all committees.
10. Create an exit survey for transitioning staff that explicitly collects data regarding hiring practices and District culture with the goal of retaining staff members that are culturally responsive.

11. Develop partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities as well as colleges and universities with diverse teacher education programs (including Latinx and Asian students) to target recruitment and hiring initiatives.
12. Develop processes and procedures to be used in candidate screenings that include questions and scenarios related to race, equity and diversity.

PILLAR II CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING & LEARNING

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

We believe:

- If we provide **all students** with equitable access to common core courses and to high-quality teachers who demonstrate culturally responsive instructional practices, students will achieve academic and personal success.
- If we provide **students and staff** with anti-racist analysis and common language regarding structural racism, a collective consciousness will emerge, increasing cross-cultural trust and building an environment that invites anti-racist teaching and learning.
- 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 that include anti-racist principles, then referral rates for exclusionary discipline will decrease significantly for students of color.

STRATEGIES:

1. Establish curriculum teams responsible for reviewing curriculum 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 curricula grounded in authentic learning experiences that mirror our diverse student body's ways of learning, knowing, reading, understanding, communicating and demonstrating curiosity and knowledge. The curricula 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 (racial, gender, sexual identity, linguistic, religious, ability-based, socioeconomic, or other salient cultural identities) when analyzing, reviewing and revising curriculum frameworks to address the decentering of Whiteness while centering Black ideologies and pedagogies.
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) in a way that is comprehensive (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. **Ensure our** Library/Media Centers emphasize inclusion by including materials that address the issues of multicultural/anti-racist education.
6. Analyze outcome data disparities across race, gender, students who are differently abled, English Language 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.
7. Develop school-based Equity Teams to make recommendations regarding practices, policies and procedures to interrupt and transform school cultural norms that maintain institutional racism. Equity teams will 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 on students of color.
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 social-emotional learning within lessons as discrete learning activities that are culturally responsive and transformative.
11. Implement trauma-informed, restorative justice principles of school discipline in all schools —including 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. Such staff will exhibit the knowledge, attitudes, skills and practices to interrupt institutional racism.
13. Empower students through equitable access to technology, including the development of computer literacy and digital media literacy, for both present and future innovations.

PILLAR III CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

If the District is to achieve excellence through racial equity, our BOE, administration and staff must reach beyond the hallways and classrooms of our schools to engage all families and stakeholders; to organize cross-sectors in collaboration; and ultimately to build bridges between our schools and beloved community that uphold anti-racist beliefs, protocols, practices and policies for the benefit of all children.

We believe:

- That parents, caregivers and community environment are vital to a successful partnership, cultivating relationships and consistently reflecting on and honoring students' full humanity. 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 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 all families 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. Encourage parents/guardians who reflect the diversity of our students to participate in parent leadership roles in the schools/district.
2. Create school-specific communication links between the school and home to ensure that everyone is able to access information.
3. Disseminate all communications in the preferred language and format desired.
4. Provide support for our Family Resource Centers, Students Support Services, and Guidance Department 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.
5. Leverage the knowledge of parents to create strong parental in-school communities.
6. 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.
7. Solicit parent/guardian assistance in understanding values and culture diversity.
8. Develop multiple engagement systems (e.g. holding meetings at different hours, providing transportation and child care, using parent apps, etc.) to expand access to and communication with families of diverse backgrounds.
9. Provide translators, and purchase of a translation system for school buildings, at all levels of family and community engagement within the District, including the enrollment process, processing parental concerns and addressing efforts to seek support.
10. 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 as well as the district's progress in addressing racial inequity.
11. Create, cultivate and sustain welcoming environments that reflect and support the diversity of school, home and community.
12. Build ongoing trust equity and consensus for common analysis, language, understanding and support of anti-racist principles between district families and staff to create lifelong learners.

PILLAR IV

CULTURAL & ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

In order for the District to achieve excellence through racial equity, our system must undergo a cultural and organizational transformation to build a culture of inclusion that actively challenges institutional racism. The Board of Education and Administrative 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.
- 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 research practices, we will be able to more accurately represent, assess and evaluate the needs and behaviors of students and families.

STRATEGIES:

1. Using a mixed methods approach, disaggregate student data across areas of discipline, academic achievement, on-time graduation rates, special education referrals and advanced courses of study to develop equity action plans as part of our ongoing practice.
2. Utilize an equity lens in developing all areas of teaching and learning, program development and institutional practices.
3. Utilize Cycle of Inquiry Framework at each school level through building-level Equity Teams and action plans developed annually through building-level student data analysis.
4. Conduct annual reviews of school policies (e.g. code of conduct) with regard to sociocultural responsiveness, diversity and inclusion.
5. Work to ensure school and classroom climates reflect sensitivity to a diverse student population. Using restorative practices as a way to build community.
6. Assess school climate using a variety of measures to collect diverse stakeholders' perceptions and experiences.
7. Ensure all district-level and building-level committees, including personnel interview committees, are diverse in their makeup.
8. Continue to search for and remove barriers for student groups, to ensure all students have access to the most rigorous courses available.
9. Use a race-conscious lens and antiracist principles during the annual review process.

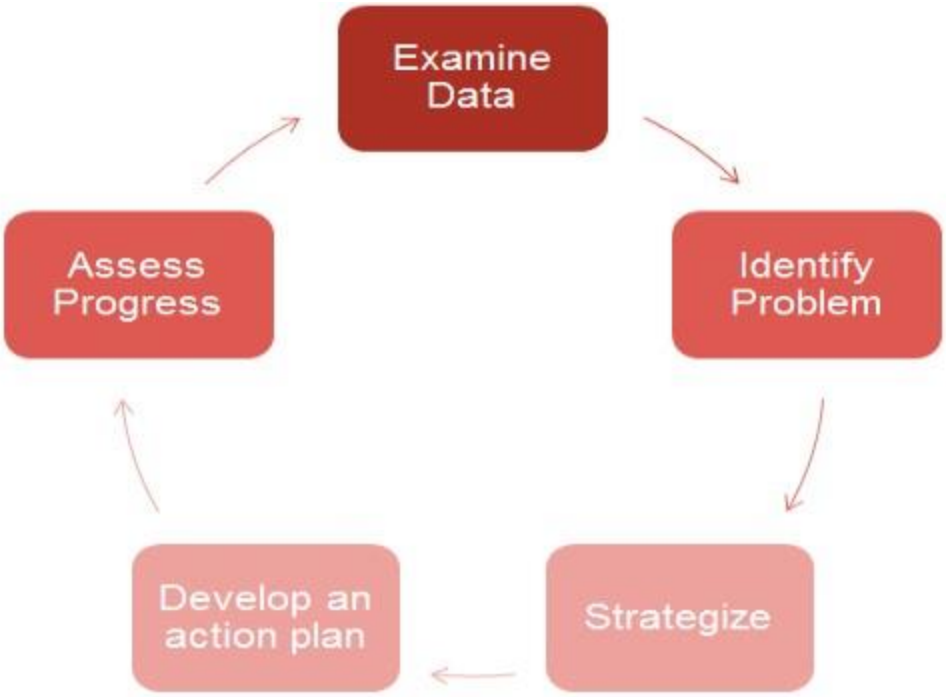
FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING CAPACITY WITHIN OUR SCHOOLS

The framework for building capacity within the school system 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:
    - Deepen understanding of root cause analysis including how and why inequities and disparate outcomes occur.
    - Implement strategies to turn those patterns and trends around.
    - Develop skills and capacity to respond to student needs in culturally appropriate and respective ways.
    - Develop high academic expectations for each student.
    - Design and implement more 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. Actively strive for the following achievement and participation patterns:
    - 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 and Dual Enrollment courses), discipline, special education and on-time graduation.
5. Implement Cycles of Inquiry to deepen the district's understanding of patterns of achievement and inequities and monitor progress toward meeting our racial 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.


Examine Data
Identify Problem
Strategize
Develop an action plan
Assess Progress