

SUBJECT: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND RACIAL EQUITY

Accepted Beliefs and Agreements

The Highland Central School District acknowledges that we can only serve all students **equitably** and achieve the same **rigorous** outcomes for all students when we actively incorporate an equity lens in all aspects of education, including **climate, culture, curriculum, professional development, and hiring**.

We believe all students benefit from diverse and inclusive schools and classrooms. We strive to welcome and support all students, families, and school staff.

The Highland Central School District aspires to:

- Recruit and retain a faculty that is reflective of an increasingly diverse student body.
- Empower students to speak up about inequities.
- Confront bias and bigotry with firmness and clarity.
- Implement an educational response to the use of biased language/ statements, actions (not simply a disciplinary action).
- Furnish welcoming and student-centered physical spaces. Reflect student identities and celebrate multiculturalism in the school environment. Represent *all types of families and experiences* in books and materials in the classroom, libraries, and on the curriculum.
- Use an equity lens to approach curriculum content, as well as learning modalities and assessments.
- Create a learning community where students are open to making mistakes.
- Value diversity. Present many stories and perspectives.
- Build comfort having and facilitating difficult conversations about power, privilege, identity, and society.

Commitments (General Statement of Policy)

The Board of Education commits to support the district in doing the following in pursuit of Diversity, Inclusion, and Racial Equity in Highland Central Schools:

A. District Climate and Culture

HCS D is committed to an environment free of racism, discrimination and institutional bias in which all students can succeed. This shall be enabled through the following:

- a. Commit to culturally responsive-sustaining education, and include all stakeholders in the creation, development, modeling, and ongoing training and implementation of culturally responsive-sustaining educational practices
- b. Establish practices to ensure that students are empowered to report inequities in confidence.
- c. Conduct annual review of school rules and disciplinary practices (i.e. dress code, discipline code, conduct code), by collaborating with parents, teachers, community members and incorporating research-based best practices such as restorative practices, positive behavior interventions and supports

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- d. Strengthen family-school connections through culturally and linguistically accessible communication, programming, and collaboration
- e. Support extracurricular programs and community engagement designed to promote opportunities for cross-cultural and cross-racial interactions that foster respect and learning

B. Curriculum

HCSD is committed to an environment that teaches students to be global citizens, is culturally responsive, promotes student voice, and engages students in authentic learning opportunities.

The Superintendent or designee(s) will ensure that curriculum and instructional materials reflect the Board's commitment to educational equity. Curriculum and instructional materials for all grades shall reflect diversity and include a range of perspectives and experiences, particularly those of historically underrepresented groups.

This shall be enabled through the following:

- a. Support teachers in establishing a culturally responsive and relevant curriculum inclusive of perspectives from diverse peoples, and families of varying structures and marginalized and oppressed peoples underrepresented in the current curriculum
- b. Promote opportunities for students to critically examine topics of power and privilege, centering critical thinking, helping students appreciate content-area concepts from multiple points of view/experiences, illuminating stereotyping and other related biases
- c. Utilize differentiated approaches to meet the learning and linguistic needs of every student. Support classroom environments that are flexible, empowered, and equitable in their measures of student growth, assessment, and learning modalities, and support necessary professional development for staff to meet this standard
- d. Promote *student voice* in curriculum and support youth in becoming active and engaged participants in their academic experience, and engage students of all ages in relevant and authentic learning opportunities including local history, community engagement, and current events

C. Professional Development

HCSD is committed to training and building the capacity of teachers in delivering instruction that is rigorous, student-centered, and promotes students as agents of positive social change, and of all staff to address bias and navigate the school environment with cultural competence.

The Superintendent of Schools, or designee, will:

- a. Promote Implicit Bias trainings and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion professional development for all staff on an annual basis
- b. Incorporate a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion lens in Professional Development choices, with reference to the NYSED Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework

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- c. Support faculty and staff in participating in professional development relevant to Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education and the district's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion goals
- d. Gather data from students and faculty in order to help inform professional development programming

D. Staff Diversity

HCS D is committed to a hiring process that is rigorous, fair, and equitable, and will attempt to cultivate a staff that is more reflective of an increasingly diverse student body through the following measures:

- a. Continue to investigate new avenues to attract a diverse candidate pool for positions
- b. Incorporate multiple questions focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion from the developed question bank
- c. Utilize a common rubric to evaluate candidate responses
- d. Encourage student voice in the hiring process (for example, sitting on interview committees, creating questions for candidates, and participating in demo lessons).
- e. Continue to implement and strengthen a mentoring program for new staff members to help facilitate growth and ensure professional and personal support

E. Accountability, Transparency, and Review

- a. The HCS D Board of Education established the Diversity, Inclusion and Racial Equity Committee, consisting of student, parent, community member, teacher, and administrative representatives, in 2020 as an ad hoc response to community concerns and student reports coupled with a resounding national response to historical trends of discrimination and inequality. The committee will continue to meet quarterly and as needed to weigh in on topics surrounding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the district. Any stakeholder in the district can bring concerns to the committee for discussion, research, and input.
 - The Superintendent of Schools, or designee shall act as the point of contact for the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Liaison.
 - A tenured teacher or administrator shall be appointed annually on a voluntary basis by the superintendent to act as *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Liaison*. The liaison will facilitate meetings of the DIRECommittee, work with administration to develop and implement initiatives and analyze data, and act as a liaison between the committee, students, and staff.
- b. Accountability: HCS D is committed to continuing to examine disaggregated academic achievement, discipline, and other data in order to identify disparities. The district will identify the multiple indicators to monitor student outcomes, engagement, funding, student need, and school climate and ensure that all students can succeed in an environment free of racism, discrimination and institutional bias. Quantitative data including Dignity for All

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Students Act (DASA) reports, disciplinary referral statistics, climate surveys, and NYSED testing data will be utilized to inform programs and initiatives.

- i. An annual *Equity Report* shall be presented to the Board of Education and to the DIRECommittee by the Superintendent, or designee(s), in conjunction with the DEI Liaison. This report shall include:
 1. Academic achievement and growth data disaggregated by available federally accountable student groups, gender, disability, grade, and school to increase transparency and promote access and opportunity. This data will include, but will not be limited to:
 - a. Class size
 - b. Course placement at middle and high school level
 - c. Attendance
 - d. Grade point average
 - e. Graduation rates/drop-out rates
 - f. Suspensions, referrals, and other disciplinary actions
 2. Disaggregated data gathered from surveys and other mechanisms designed to gauge progress on school climate
 3. Status report on efforts and initiatives in line with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Goals
- ii. Administrative cabinet will meet annually to review the same report, discuss findings, and develop an action plan to ameliorate any existing disparities or disproportionalities.
- c. Communication: The Superintendent, or designee(s), will ensure that this policy is communicated to students, staff, and the community. This policy will be posted on the district's website, and will also be published in any appropriate school publications.
- d. Community Feedback: The Board commits to engaging the community and stakeholders in policy and district-wide decision making. This includes the direct solicitation of feedback through outreach and engagement, with the goal of reaching a representative sample of the community, especially impacted groups.

Definitions

1. **Bias** is defined as a belief or attitude that affects our understanding, decision, and actions.
2. **Bigotry** is the conscious expression of intolerance, bias or prejudice against groups of people, especially racial or religious groups
3. School **Climate** refers to the individual experience of students, teachers, families and staff about the school, how positively or negatively the school is perceived, the character and quality of school life.

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4. School **Culture** refers to the guiding beliefs and values, teaching and learning approaches, behaviors, and relationships among individuals in a school over time.
5. **Cultural responsiveness** acknowledges the presence of culturally **diverse** students and the need for students to find relevant connections among themselves and the subject matter and the tasks teachers ask them to perform.
6. The **Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework** (NYSED) is a document created by the New York State Board of Regents in consultation with experts and stakeholders that helps educators create student-centered learning environments that affirm racial, linguistic and cultural identities; prepare students for rigor and independent learning, develop students' abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices; and empower students as agents of social change.
7. **Curriculum** refers to the content and methodology of teaching and learning. It includes the texts that teachers use in their classroom, the content and understandings that are centered, and the means (lessons, materials, assessments, etc.) for leading students to proficiency in terms of skills and knowledge.
8. **DASA**, New York State's Dignity for All Students Act (The Dignity Act) seeks to provide the State's public elementary and secondary school students with a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, intimidation, taunting, harassment, and bullying on school property, a school bus and/or at a school function.
9. **Disaggregated data** is information that is broken down into smaller, specific categories for analysis. It helps identify patterns and differences within a larger dataset.
10. **Disparities** mean the unequal outcomes of one subgroup (e.g., racial or ethnic groups) as compared to outcomes for another subgroup.
11. **Disproportionality** is the underrepresentation or overrepresentation of a subgroup (e.g., racial or ethnic groups) *compared to its percentage in the total population*.
12. **Diversity** is a reality created by individuals and groups from a broad spectrum of demographic and philosophical differences. These differences can exist along dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, language heritage, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of difference contained within everyone. Finally, we acknowledge that categories of difference are not always fixed but can be fluid, and we respect individual rights to self identification, as no one culture is intrinsically superior to another.

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13. **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 student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories including rates of graduation. The principle of educational equity goes beyond formal equality where students are treated the same. Instead, educational equity fosters a barrier-free environment in which *all students have the opportunity to benefit equally*. For example, equality would mean that all students would have the opportunity to attend a field trip costing thirty dollars. Equity would mean ensuring that all students could attend the field trip regardless of whether their families could afford the cost.
14. **Equity lens** means an intentional focus on analyzing or diagnosing the impact of the design and implementation of policies on under-served and marginalized individuals and groups, and to identify and potentially eliminate barriers.
15. **Historically marginalized** refers to individuals who have not been able, due to societal constraints, to compete fairly in society (NYSSBA).
16. **Identity** is the complex picture of who we are as individuals, including factors such as gender, race, religion, geographic or national origin, linguistic heritage, as well as our experiences, beliefs, and values.
17. **Inclusion** means more than simply diversity and numerical representation. Being inclusive involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging. In an inclusive school, the social and instructional space is designed such that all students have access to the curriculum and there are many opportunities for students to be successful.
18. **Implicit bias** is defined as a belief or attitude that affects our understanding, decision, and actions, and that exists without our conscious awareness.
19. **Institutional racism** is racial inequity baked into our institutions, connoting a system of power that produces racial disparities in domains such as law, health, employment, education, and so on. It can take the form of unfair policies and practices, discriminatory treatment and inequitable opportunities and outcomes. A school system that concentrates people of color in the most overcrowded and under resourced schools with the least qualified teachers, compared to the educational opportunities of more advantaged students, is an example of institutional racism.
20. **Internalized racism** is the private racial beliefs held by and within individuals. The way we absorb social messages about race and adopt them as personal beliefs, biases, and prejudices are all within the realm of internalized racism.
21. **Oppressed** means exploited, denied rights, or systematically harmed.

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22. **Power** means access to privileges such as information/knowledge, connections, experience and expertise, resources and decision-making that enhance a person's chances of getting what they need to live a comfortable, safe, productive and profitable life.
23. **Privilege** is unearned power, benefits, advantages, access and/or opportunities that exist for members of the dominant group(s) in society. Can also refer to the relative privilege of one group compared to another. Privilege implies that wherever there is a system of oppression (such as capitalism, patriarchy, or white supremacy) there is an oppressed group and also a privileged group, who benefit from the oppressions that this system puts in place. Privilege and power are closely related: privilege often gives a person or group power over others.
24. **Racism** is widely thought of as simply personal prejudice, but, in fact, it is a complex system of racial hierarchies and inequities. At the micro level of racism, or individual level, are internalized and interpersonal systems of ingrained bias. At the macro level of racism, we focus beyond individuals to the broader dynamics, including symbolic, ideological, institutional, and structural systems of racial hierarchies and inequities. (New York State Education Department Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework)
25. **Resources** in this context include books, articles, online platforms, training and consultations.
26. **Restorative Practices** (RP) build and strengthen relationships by using affective statements/questions and creating a "Culture of Care" that develops and maintains a sense of belonging among the community. RP also address harm done to others by promoting accountability and responsibility. The goal is to build, maintain, and repair relationships so that individuals and communities grow closer together. (Restorative practices)
27. **Rigor** is defined as instruction, schoolwork, learning experiences, and educational expectations that are academically, intellectually, and personally challenging. Rigorous learning experiences, for example, help students understand knowledge and concepts that are complex, ambiguous, or contentious, and they help students acquire skills that can be applied in a variety of educational, career, and civic contexts throughout their lives.
28. **Socioeconomic status** is the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. Examinations of socioeconomic status often reveal inequities in access to resources, as well as issues related to privilege, power, and control.
29. **Staff Diversity** refers to having a mix of people from different backgrounds and identities in an organization. It values inclusivity, equality, and a variety of perspectives.

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30. **Systemic Equity** is a complex combination of interrelated elements consciously designed to create, support, and sustain social justice. It is a robust system and dynamic process that reinforces and replicates equitable ideas, power, resources, strategies, conditions, habits, and outcomes. (NYSED CRSE Framework)
31. **Underrepresented** groups are those whose percentage of the population in a given group (e.g. authors of books in the library, administrators, AP students) is lower than their percentage of the population as a whole.

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