

OKEMOS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EQUITY PLAN

2016-2019

MARCH, 2016



WE BELIEVE FOCUSING ON EQUITY WITHIN OUR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IS CRITICAL TO THE DISTRICT'S MISSION OF: "TOGETHER...EDUCATING WITH EXCELLENCE, INSPIRING LEARNERS FOR LIFE".

Okemos Public Schools

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Equity Plan

March, 2016

Prepared by:

Dr. Catherine J. Ash, Superintendent

Okemos Public Schools

OKEMOS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

FINAL REPORT

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BACKGROUND

In March of 2012, The Okemos Public Schools' Board of Education adopted a Strategic Plan that would establish priorities and focus the district's efforts from 2012-2016. This strategic planning process was characterized by full and active participation of thirty-six (36) planners. The planners identified the critical issues facing the district, as well as developed broad goals and strategies to address the critical issues. One of the identified critical areas of focus having the "greatest strategic importance" to the long-term well-being of Okemos Public Schools was DIVERSITY. Specifically, two goals were established:

- ❖ Goal 3: Establish the district as a leader within the community for promoting and establishing a positive direction toward inclusive diversity.
- ❖ Goal 4: Create a school environment where students, staff and community recognize and appreciate the diverse attributes and identities of each other.

Recognizing the importance, as well as the commitment to this work, the Superintendent established the following as one of three professional goals:

- ❖ Goal 1: Create a *culturally competent and responsive* school environment where students, staff and community recognize, embrace, celebrate, appreciate and value the diverse attributes and identities of each other.

A strategy that is assisting in achieving this goal was the establishment of a district Cultural Diversity Advisory Committee to inform and advise the Superintendent, promoting informed, relevant and impactful action.

During the spring of 2014, all high school students, staff members, parents/guardians and community members were invited to consider serving on this committee. Over forty (43) applications were received and seventeen (17) individuals with very diverse backgrounds and perspectives were selected to serve on the advisory committee. This committee served a critical role in our school community's development of this Equity Plan.

Based on a variety of data sources, it was evident that a focused and strategic effort was needed to create a culturally competent, responsive and inclusive school environment for ALL our students. Critical components in defining our current reality, identifying areas of focus and informing specific goals included student (grades 7-12), parents/guardian (K-12) and staff (K-12) surveys, discipline data, special education reports, achievement data, as well as formal and informal conversations with students, parents/guardians, staff and community members. The following opportunities elicited invaluable input and feedback, informing the final plan:

- ❖ **Equity Planning Sessions** (October 28th and November 17, 2015): All directors, principals and school board members, as well as the Cultural Diversity Advisory Committee and additional high school students developed a draft Equity Plan. This work was facilitated by Dr. Dorinda Andrews Carter and Ms. Teresa Bingman.

- ❖ **Community Conversation with Board of Education** (January 13, 2016): All high school students, parents/guardians, staff members and community members were invited to the conversation, seeking input and feedback on the draft Equity Plan. Over one hundred (100) individuals actively participated, offering diverse perspectives and insights. This work was facilitated by Dr. Dorinda Andrews Carter and Ms. Teresa Bingman.
- ❖ **Equity Plan Steering Committee:** Significant input was captured from participants in the equity planning sessions and the community conversation. A steering committee was utilized to synthesize and organize the feedback, informing the Equity Plan revisions.
- ❖ **Cultural Diversity Advisory Committee Meeting** (March 2, 2016): The committee reviewed and finalized the Equity Plan.

COMMITTEES & PARTICIPANTS

The participants in the equity planning sessions identified areas of focus, goals and broad strategies that promote equity and actions free from discrimination, and provided a clear direction for the district's continued work from 2016-2019. The final document honors the ideas brought forward by students, staff, parents/guardians, board members and community members during the planning sessions, as well as the community conversation.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Christina Alighire Faculty | Melinda Barcelon Student | Ira Childress Director of Athletics |
| Adam Clements Faculty | Elizabeth Clifford Parent | Xavier Durand-Hollis Parent |
| Beth Josephson Faculty | Daniel Kemsley, EdD Community Member | Melanie Lynn Board President |
| Cory Nieland Faculty | Eduardo Olivo Community Member | Ana Polit Student |
| Su Penn Parent/Past Member | Chand Rajendra-Nicolucci Student | Bethany Rigg Community Member |
| Kevin Scott Community Member | Mina Shin, PhD Parent | Leeni Shrestha Parent |

EQUITY PLANNING SESSIONS: PARTICIPANTS

Board Members

Dean Bolton
Amy Crites
Melanie Lynn
Vincent Lyon-Callo, PhD
Punya Mishra, PhD
Tonya Rodriguez
Donald Romain

Directors

Errin Chapman
Ira Childress
Robert Clark
Lynna Hassenger
Steve Lathrop
Heather Pricco
Todd Sharp

Principals

Bob Bullock
Steve Delp, PhD
Melissa Eades, EdD
Tara Fry
Andrea Hallead
Sue Hallman
John Hood
Gary Kinzer
Jody Noble
Noelle Palasty
Christine Sermak

Other Administration

Catherine Ash, PhD., Supt.
Patricia Trelstad, Deputy
Supt.

Additional Students

Chaz Richardson
Atam Shugayev

Cultural Diversity Advisory Committee

See above

EQUITY PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

Catherine Ash, PhD
Superintendent

Melissa Eades, EdD
Assistant Principal

Tara Fry
Principal

John Hood
Principal

Lynna Hassenger
Director of Food Service

Jody Noble
Principal

Christine Sermak
Principal

Patricia Trelstad
Deputy Superintendent

EQUITY STATEMENT

We believe focusing on equity within our school environment is critical to the district's mission of: "Together...educating with excellence, inspiring learners for life".

As a district enhanced by diversity, Okemos Public Schools is dedicated to an ongoing process of creating and sustaining an inclusive and safe culture for students, families and staff.

We respect, value, honor and celebrate the rich dimensions of diversity within our community, including but not limited to: biological sex, disability, ethnicity, family status, gender identity/expression, language, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation and socio-economic status.

Together, students, family and staff are committed to cultivating a culturally competent and responsive school community to ensure that we are meeting the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of ALL of our students. We will promote equity and eliminate barriers to learning with the goal of improved student achievement and an enhanced social consciousness.

AREAS OF FOCUS

To promote equity and actions that are free from discrimination:

- ❖ Authentic Selves and Relationships
- ❖ Cultural Competence
- ❖ Instruction/Curriculum/Assessments
- ❖ Policies/Practices/Procedures

STRATEGIC GOALS & STRATEGIES

AUTHENTIC SELVES AND RELATIONSHIPS

GOAL 1: Create a school environment where students, parents/guardians/families and staff recognize and appreciate the diverse attributes and identities of one another by honoring self-expression and individuality.

Strategies:

- A. Actively engage students, parents/guardians/families and staff in opportunities to explore, reflect and learn more about themselves, one another and their diverse backgrounds.
- B. Actively engage students, parents/guardians/families and staff in opportunities to examine their conscious and unconscious bias.

GOAL 2: Promote authentic relationships (student to student, student to staff, staff to parent/guardian/families, and staff to staff- to name a few) in order to build trust and respect, engage in open and honest communication to establish a collaborative team.

Strategies:

- A. Utilize restorative practices to create understanding, teach and build empathy, and heal relationships.
- B. Increase skill sets/tools for effectively working with people from different cultures and backgrounds.
- C. Increase engagement of students, parents/guardians/families and staff in our school community.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

GOAL 3: Increase cultural competence of **students** to decrease conscious and unconscious bias and its intended and unintended outcomes of discrimination.

Strategies:

- A. Actively engage in learning activities to foster self-awareness of different perspectives, conscious and unconscious bias, cultural blindness, inherent privileges, etc.
- B. Engage in specific learning opportunities to increase knowledge and understanding of diverse attributes and culture.
- C. Develop skills to become cultural advocates and agents of social justice, to promote an inclusive and safe (emotional and physical) environment, to interact effectively respond to all cultural differences in a knowledgeable, respectful and sensitive manner.

GOAL 4: Increase cultural competence of **staff** to decrease conscious and unconscious bias and its intended and unintended outcomes of discrimination.

Strategies:

- A. Actively engage in professional development to raise self-awareness of different perspectives, bias, cultural blindness, inherent privileges, etc.
- B. Engage in specific learning opportunities to increase knowledge and understanding of diverse attributes and culture.
- C. Develop skills to become cultural advocates, fostering the skills we want to instill in our students and parents/guardians/families.
- D. Develop skills to interact effectively and respond to all cultural differences in a knowledgeable, respectful and sensitive manner.
- E. Develop skills to teach our diverse student population, promoting engagement of all.

GOAL 5: Increase cultural competence of **parents/guardians/families** to decrease conscious and unconscious bias and its intended and unintended outcomes of discrimination.

Strategies:

- A. Utilize teachable moments (providing information within the context of real-life scenarios) and effectively respond to cultural differences.
- B. Engage the community in conversations on the topic of cultural competence, increasing knowledge and understanding of diverse attributes and culture.
- C. Engage the community in conversations to raise self-awareness of different perspectives, bias, cultural blindness, inherent privileges etc.
- D. Engage in ongoing communication regarding relevant diversity topics, implementation of strategies, activities and opportunities.

INSTRUCTION/CURRICULUM/ASSESSMENT

GOAL 6: Ensure instruction, curriculum and assessment practices are inclusive of diverse perspectives, cultures and our global world.

Strategies:

- A. Create and promote opportunities to include perspectives that are not represented in textbooks and state approved standards.
 - a. *Include literature (text, international film, media, current events, etc.) that is reflective of diverse authors, backgrounds and perspectives in all of our classrooms.*
 - b. *Create safe, brave and inclusive environments for perspectives to be shared.*
- B. Teach students to think critically about concepts/issues that include diverse perspectives and experiences through project based learning and real world applications.
- C. Create and evaluate assessments that are free of unintentional bias and allow students of different backgrounds to demonstrate what they have learned.
- D. Increase student engagement by providing opportunities to share diverse backgrounds and learn from one another.
- E. Utilize assessment practices to ensure students have the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge in a variety of ways.

GOAL 7: Analyze assessment data, specifically demographic data and develop strategies to close the achievement gap and increase the academic proficiency of all students.

Strategies:

- A. Utilize district and school “data days” and PLCs to review data for individual and/or groups of students to plan for interventions and progress monitoring.

POLICIES/PRACTICES/PROCEDURES

GOAL 8: To ensure policies, practices and procedures are equitable and free from discrimination.

Strategies:

- A. Review, revise and implement incident reporting mechanisms (students, staff and parents/guardians/families) in an open and safe environment.
- B. Review, revise and implement hiring practices for recruiting and retaining a diverse staff.
- C. Review, revise and implement policies, practices and procedures to ensure they are “user friendly” and accessible.
- D. Create and evaluate assessments that are free of unintentional bias and allow students of different backgrounds to demonstrate what they have learned.
- E. Increase student engagement by providing opportunities to share diverse backgrounds and learn from one another.

APPENDIX A

DEFINITIONS

It is recognized that many of the terms below have multiple definitions and interpretations. As we proceed with this relevant and impactful work, It is important to establish a shared understanding and interpretation of the specific terms utilized within our Equity Plan.

1. **Authentic Self** - Level of identity that is the real, true, genuine substance of who a person is; who the person is at their absolute core; the part of an individual that is not defined by external sources, pressures and/or “expectations”; knowing one’s authentic self is an on-going process of self- reflection, exploration, challenge, new insights, and personal and professional growth.
2. **Biological sex**- The physical sex characteristics you’re born with and develop, including genitalia, body shape, voice pitch, body hair, hormones, chromosomes etc. . .
3. **Bias** - The unfavorable judgment or evaluation of one group and its members relative to another.; expressed directly/explicitly:
 - A. **Conscious**- Person is aware of his/her evaluation or judgment and believes it is true or accurate.
 - B. **Unconscious**- Person doesn’t perceive or endorse the evaluation or judgment; Person is not aware of the consequences of unfavorable judgment, but unconsciously perpetuates that thinking. Person is not aware of societal influences on his/her judgment or evaluation and internalizes social stereotypes in their thinking.
4. **Cultural competence**- A set of values, behaviors, attitudes, and practices within a system, organization, program or among individuals and which enables them to work effectively cross culturally. An ability to reflect on experiences with diverse cultures to demonstrate knowledge and sensitivity. An ability or willingness to purposefully engage with others and create an environment for productive and respectful relations with others.
5. **Culturally inclusive**- Being or creating an environment that acknowledges, respects, values, and embraces diverse cultures. The perspectives and contributions of each individual, including their diversity are embraced and valued. In an inclusive environment, people of all cultural orientations can: freely express who they are, their own opinions and points of view; fully participate in teaching, learning, work and social activities; feel safe from conscious or unconscious mistreatment, harassment or unfair criticism
6. **Culturally responsive teaching** - Using cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduit for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal and are learned more easily and thoroughly.

7. **Culture** - A shared, learned system consisting of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, attitudes, meanings and symbols that shapes and influences one's perceptions, behaviors and interaction patterns in the world; passed on from one generation to the next and are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community; ways of thinking, knowing and being in the world.
8. **Discrimination** - The unjust or prejudicial treatment (intentionally or unintentionally) of different categories of people based on membership in a particular social group (e.g., race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, religion, social class, etc. . .)
 - A. **Individual** - The behavior of individual members of a particular social group that has an intended or unintended, differential and/or harmful effect on members of another social group.
 - B. **Institutional** - The unjust and discriminatory mistreatment of an individual or group of individuals by society and its *institutions* as a whole, through unequal selection or bias, intentional or unintentional; built into the normal working relationships of institutions, its perpetuation requires only that people continue "business as usual." Its eradication requires much more than good will; it requires active review of the assumptions and practices by which the institution operates, and revision of those found to have discriminatory results.
 - C. **Structural** - Practices, norms and behaviors within institutions and social structures which have the effect of denying rights or opportunities to members of minority groups, keeping them from achieving the same opportunities available to the majority group. Structural discrimination can occur both intentionally and unintentionally. The term is also used in relation to more informal practices which have become embedded in everyday organizational life and effectively become part of the system, "how we do things around here."
9. **Diversity**- The inclusion of different types of people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization
10. **Educational Equity** - Eliminate educational barriers based on gender, race/ethnicity, national origin, color, disability, age, or other protected group status; and provide equal educational opportunities and ensure that historically underserved or underrepresented populations meet the same rigorous standards for academic performance expected of all children and youth; ensure that all students have access to resources and learning; identify the intended learning outcomes and eliminating barriers for some to promote the success of all.
11. **Equality**- The quality or state of being equal: the quality or state of having the same rights, social status, etc.

- 12. Equity** - Fairness or justice in the way people are treated; fairness achieved through systematically assessing and addressing disparities in opportunities and outcomes.
- 13. Equity Lens** - Consciously consider equity (fairness) as we evaluate view opportunities and outcomes.
- 14. Ethnicity**- Affiliation or identity within a group of people bound by common ancestry and culture.
- 15. Family Status/Structure** - The combination of relatives that comprise a family; may include but is not be limited to: families with two parents/guardians (different gender, same gender), single parent/guardian, blended families, multi-generational households and/or adult siblings sharing a home.
- 16. Gender**- The attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative; behaviors that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender non-conformity.
- 17. Gender expression**- The way in which a person acts to communicate gender within a given culture; for example, in terms of clothing, communication patterns and interests. A person's gender expression may or may not be consistent with socially prescribed gender roles, and may or may not reflect his or her gender identity.
- 18. Gender identity**- Each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.
- 19. Privilege**- A special right or benefit that is given to some people and not to others. The benefits of access and social rewards which some receive, unconsciously and consciously, by virtue of their "location" in society.
- 20. Race**- A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on certain characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly skin color) ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification...Racial categories subsume ethnic groups.
- 21. Racism**- The result of people of targeted racial groups believing, acting on, or enforcing the dominant system of beliefs about themselves and members of their own racial group; The systemic subordination of members of targeted racial groups who have relatively little social power in the United States; This subordination is supported by the actions on individuals, cultural norms and values, and the institutional structures and practices of society; prejudice plus power equals racism.
- 22. Restorative practices** - Approaches utilized to enact the process of involving, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify

and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible; restore relationships and community; Restorative questions: What happened? Who has been affected and how? How do we make things right?

- 23. Self-expression** - The behavioral aesthetic, and psychological characteristics by which a person communicates their identities. One's self-expression may or may not conform to cultural expectations and may challenge stereotypical roles
- 24. Sexual Orientation-** An enduring pattern of emotional, romantic or sexual attraction (or a combination of these) to persons of the opposite sex or gender, the same sex or gender, or to both sexes or more than one gender.
- 25. Social/Structural Inequality** - Plays out and can be analyzed at every level of social organization, from the most individual and personal, to the most abstract and societal. These terms refer to the levels of social organization at which inequality is maintained and reproduced.
- 26. Social Justice** - Promoting a just society by challenging injustice and valuing diversity. It exists when "all people share a common humanity and therefore have a right to equitable treatment, support for their human rights, and a fair allocation of community resources. In conditions of social justice, people are not be discriminated against, nor their welfare and well-being constrained or prejudiced on the basis of diverse attributes or characteristic of background or group membership.
- 27. Stereotypes (labels)** - An oversimplified or overgeneralized conception, opinion, or image about certain group of people. A quick way to describe a whole group of people by emphasizing just a few characteristics. It is problematic because it reduces complex human diversity to simple assumptions and perpetuate social prejudice and inequality. Stereotypes are often used to favor certain groups over others. It reflects social values and judgments that certain groups are less valued and desired. Stereotypes are demeaning, devaluing, limiting and hurtful to people being stereotyped. "Power" plays a role in creating and reproducing stereotypes; stereotypes disempower the groups being stereotyped and they have little to say about how they are represented. This way stereotypes reproduce unfair power dynamics and naturalizes prejudices.