

# Racial Equity & Cultural Competence in Edina Public Schools

## ***Position on Racial Equity & Cultural Competence –***

Edina Public Schools is committed to looking at all district work and initiatives through a lens of racial equity so that all learners have the skills, opportunities and access to experiences that will help them reach their full potential and achieve success. Edina Public Schools will partner with families and the community to gain a better understanding of and eliminate barriers rooted in racial constructs and cultural misunderstandings that can interfere with a student's learning or reduce his/her willingness to persist academically. By applying this lens of racial equity and cultural understanding to all teaching and learning experiences, Edina Public Schools will be able to achieve its mission of educating all learners with the skills they need to thrive in a rapidly changing, culturally diverse, global society.

## ***Definition of Racial Equity & Cultural Competence –***

In Edina Public Schools, all learners will have access to rigorous and challenging learning opportunities, which lead to measured growth and high achievement without predictable links to race, culture or ethnicity. Learners will acquire an awareness of their own cultural identity and value racial, cultural and ethnic diversities so as to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds.

## ***Edina Public Schools Believes Racial Equity & Cultural Competence –***

- PROMOTE HEALTHY SCHOOL CLIMATES, providing the best opportunity for learners to be culturally aware as they interact with a diverse society
- ESTABLISH HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL LEARNERS, integrating high quality, rigorous and relevant curriculum that reflects the diversity of the student population, which in turn best prepares each learner to achieve success in college, career and life
- ERASE BARRIERS that impede all students from being successful and instead honor beliefs and practices that support the district's All for All mission to ensure each student is able to achieve at the highest level possible.

## ***Edina Public Schools Racial Equity Plan –***

A combination of professional development, community conversations, and engagement are critical to addressing racial inequities as well as achievement and opportunity gaps. Edina Public Schools acknowledges that complex societal and historical factors contribute to inequities within our organization. Nonetheless, Edina Public Schools is committed to addressing and overcoming inequities at all levels to ensure learners have the skills, opportunities and access to experiences that will help them achieve success.

The district's [\*All for All Plan\*](#), developed in 2013, advances strategic initiatives that focus on growth and achievement for each and every student, *without predictable links to race or income*. The plan focuses on action strategies around five central "gap" areas<sup>1</sup> – belief, leadership, preparation, teaching & learning, and time. Each area will include specific strategies and actions that engage and incorporate diverse voices and perspectives, and will approach success through a lens of racial equity and cultural competence.

In addition, in order to interrupt systems that perpetuate inequities, Edina Public Schools is committed to:

- Inviting and including representative voices to help examine issues and find adaptive solutions that look beyond one-time, situational fixes to addressing root causes and systemic barriers;
- Developing the personal, professional and organizations skills and knowledge of employees to enable them to address inequities; and
- Eliminating practices that result in predictably lower academic achievement for any student group compared to their peers.

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## ***Background on Racial Equity in Edina Public Schools –***

In 1989, Edina Public Schools included in its mission statement the focus on ensuring all learners have the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing, culturally diverse, global society. The mission statement articulates a long-standing belief by the Edina Public Schools community to ensure equitable access and opportunities for all learners and the importance of global competence. Since 2007, Edina Public Schools has made a concerted effort to move beyond standard diversity training to educating staff on racial equity and cultural competence. By incorporating teachings from various consultants, academic literature, and best practice research, and by engaging and listening to the voices of whom it serves, Edina Public Schools is committed to ongoing professional learning for staff, students and families so that its All for All mission can be realized.

Over the last several decades there has been a significant change with respect to racial, cultural, religious and other dimensions of identity in this society. This shift is occurring on a national, state and local level. In Edina Public Schools, demographic data show a considerable increase in the percentage of students of color enrolled – including a 10% increase in the last ten years – with projections indicating continued growth in racial diversity in the district in the future. This local demographic shift stresses the urgency to which Edina Public Schools must not only assess and enhance the delivery of instruction, but more importantly the need to better understand the changing world of today and tomorrow.

Edina Public Schools views these changes as an opportunity to not only better engage our families of color, but also to engage all staff, students and families in ways that better prepare all learners for a rapidly changing, culturally diverse, global society. There is a need for the district to be more intentional in seeking out and including all voices, especially those that have traditionally been underrepresented, in the ongoing work of Edina Public Schools.

In addition, the district acknowledges the reality that while Edina Public Schools continues to be among the top performing districts in Minnesota and across the country in terms of overall academic achievement, there exists a race-based achievement gap not unlike other districts in the region. Edina Public Schools has seen some recent gains in narrowing the gap in reading through the implementation of intentional instructional strategies, such as Response to Intervention. However, as evidenced in numerous scholarly works in the last decade, the gap cannot be closed through educational programs or instructional strategies alone. There must be a shift in how all district employees approach their work, both individually and professionally. It is imperative that attention be focused on both students and adults at the individual learner level. As Dr. Chezare A. Warren noted in a recent blog post for the Graduate School of Education at University of Pennsylvania, we must get better at “learning the student.”<sup>2</sup> That is, educators must put what they think and believe about a student, especially a student of color, aside and learn who the student really is from his/her perspective.

Only by applying a lens of racial equity to all district work and focusing on personalizing learning opportunities for all students, will Edina Public Schools and the community it serves truly advance its core mission of All for All – all stakeholders working together for the success of all learners.

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<sup>1</sup> Hassan, J. & Mahmoud, E. (2011). *A crisis in our community: Closing the five education gaps*. Minneapolis, MN: Headwaters Foundation for Justice.

<sup>2</sup> Warren. (2012, August 10). *Rethinking Culturally Responsive Pedagogy* [Web log post]. Retrieved from [http://www.gse.upenn.edu/equity/blog/rethinking\\_culturally](http://www.gse.upenn.edu/equity/blog/rethinking_culturally)