

Essex Westford School District Equity Policy Goals, Procedures, and Action Steps



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Essex Westford School District Equity Leadership Model



Below is the EWSD action planning tool for all school-based Equity Teams. It is designed to organize the EWSD Equity work around individual goals along with the Equity Advisory Committee recommendations.

Goal A: Inform curriculum decisions, including anti-racist education and LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual, +) affirming education, and disability, cultural, ethnic, religious, multi-linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity awareness and representation for educators and their students beginning in Pre-Kindergarten.

Procedure: EWSD will implement curriculum to teach the social justice standards developed by Learning for Justice and to ensure instruction is provided in antiracism, LGBTQIA+ affirmation, disability awareness, and the value of diversity of all kinds. EWSD will audit the current hidden and explicit curricula to create full representation and multiple perspectives in the context of educational practices across academic and social disciplines. Resources will be included within the EWSD budget to ensure progress toward this outcome.

EAC Recommended Action Steps:

Instruction across the content areas PreK-12 will include a diverse array of historical figures and global and local histories as well as diverse stories and experiences. All teachers will use an equity lens in the selection of materials used in their classrooms aligned with training provided to all teachers in EWSD. All teachers will have training to audit their own curriculum with an equity lens. Instructional outcomes related to this training will be a part of the supervision and evaluation system for teachers.

All schools will implement disability and neurodiversity awareness, inclusion and belonging instruction for all students annually as a component of health and wellness curriculum.

EWSD will implement Social Emotional Learning as well as social justice instruction through a standards-based approach.

In EWSD sex education will be delivered in a way that is LGBTQIA + affirming and remove heteronormative assumptions.

EWSD will annually budget to ensure materials, training, and resources are in place for progress in the goals of the EWSD Equity Policy.

Goal B: Redefine accountability procedures and frameworks to center transformation and redressing harm.

Procedure: EWSD will create a comprehensive bias response design to ensure clear reporting (including anonymous reporting) and action following incidents of bias, harassment, and other forms of harm. This system will align with required laws related to HHB and Title IX while also embracing and implementing restorative practices. Student voice will be a part of the design of these systems. EWSD will institute a comprehensive system of restorative practices across the district no later than the end of the 2023-2024 school year. EWSD will be data-driven in the analysis of the Equity Policy to ensure progress. This data will include student and family experiences with EWSD. EWSD will seek an external audit of this policy in the 2023-2024 school year.

EAC Recommended Action Steps:

EWSD will analyze data and inputs related to the goals of the EWSD Equity Policy annually. EWSD will seek an external review of the implementation of the EWSD Equity Policy every three years beginning in FY2024. As a component of this data, student surveys and students' voices will be a prominent component of this analysis. EWSD administration will provide quarterly updates to the EWSD school board related to policy implementation.

EWSD will implement a bias incident reporting system (online reporting and data tracking) and program (instruction, communication, education, panels, and other components). The system and program will enable all stakeholders, including families and community members to access and report bias related to their experience or their child's experience. EWSD will develop clear actions and potential consequences that community members can expect from the program. Bias response systems will be set up for students and employees throughout the district that protect people from harm based on identity and other characteristics. Students and families will be provided access to anonymous reporting as well as reporting incidents in ways that value their experience and do not question their lived experience.

The Bias Incident Reporting system and program will consider the level of severity and the expected actions and consequences that are appropriate for the situation and nature of the incident. The actions and consequences will also match and meet the needs of different age groups, such as but not limited to hosted restorative circle conversations with younger age students, assigned courses or classes to take, and risk of termination for ESWD employees.

The Bias Incident Reporting system and program will offer a level of confidentiality and privacy to the extent possible and will consider the appropriate people who have a legitimate need to know and **be** informed.

The Bias Incident Reporting system and program will include the component of educating members of EWSD as part of its core purpose. The education program teaches members of the community the tools and importance of hosting and having hard conversations around impact and harm. The program leverages real incidents to contextualize and localize the learning experience.

EWSD schools will create age-appropriate restorative practices (e.g. restorative circles, conferences, panels, and conferences) to redress incidents and situations. EWSD will provide ongoing training to teachers, staff, and administrators on age-appropriate restorative justice practices and approaches they can leverage in their classrooms.

The restorative justice panels will intentionally include and integrate a wide range of stakeholder voices and backgrounds. The restorative justice panels will emphasize and center on shared decision-making and collaboration with student

EWSD will conduct audits of forms and processes with an equity and restorative lens to ensure accessibility. EWSD will create or amend forms and reporting tools to be accessible to all community members.

EWSD will train and develop employees to create safe, trusted spaces for students. Employees are expected to create safe and affirming spaces for all students to share their experiences of harm without being dismissed or minimized.

Goal C: Support and protect people in underserved, marginalized positions while in school care.

Procedure: Schools will train all staff to ensure students experience regularly facilitated discussions about justice, identity, and diversity across content areas. Affinity spaces and other organizational social supports will be in place for students to access based on their needs. Designated employees will be clearly identified for reporting any harassment or bias incidents, and all employees will be trained to recognize issues of inequity and how to bring those forward for resolution.

EAC Recommended Action Steps:

EWSD will provide training to all teachers to access referral and support systems for student needs. Teachers will provide responses to student requests for support as a regular practice.

Each EWSD school will have designated employees in addition to school counselors specifically trained to recognize and address bias incidents.

EWSD will implement an annual reporting system related to equity and inclusion which includes feedback from families regarding schools and teachers.

EWSD will increase access to transportation and childcare for families requiring such support to be a part of school-based experiences.

Goal D: Ensure family engagement is inclusive and centers the needs, experiences, and decision-making (both process and content) of people from communities who are systemically and structurally oppressed within the district.

Procedure: All EWSD schools will develop a plan to redefine and expand family engagement. This plan will be designed to reduce barriers to communication, participation, language, classroom information, and information about students' social-emotional learning. EWSD will provide training on family and community engagement for school and district leaders to support these plans. Special attention to barriers for those currently and historically under-represented in engagement opportunities will be centered.

EAC Recommended Action Steps

EWSD will implement expectations of family-centered processes, including regular outreach about family needs to be engaged in the education process as well as universally designing family engagement to reduce barriers. (This should probably go in Goal D)

Teachers and leaders will create equitable opportunities for family engagement. Accessible and regular communication for all families will be a critical feature of teaching and learning in EWSD. This will include access to and participation in offerings, meetings, decision making, and written and oral communications. This will include multiple modalities and accessible engagement in offerings, meetings, decision making, written and oral communications, and administrative communication. Families who have cultures that hold expectations that are different from the dominant culture will have access to request variances from systemic expectations that don't align with their cultural beliefs.

EWSD will incorporate training related to family and community engagement for all leaders and teachers in ways that build an understanding of cultural and identity inclusiveness across all settings.

EWSD will develop a feedback system for families that is accessible and reduces barriers to collecting information about the level of engagement experienced by families from diverse backgrounds and identities. EWSD will revise and address the process of entry for new families to EWSD that will include a liaison that causes an individualized approach. EWSD will expect all employees to approach criticisms with a non-defensive approach and with curiosity in family experiences with the school district.

EWSD will provide training to students, parents, and community to support collective responsibility and accountability for building a sense of belonging and an understanding of implicit bias, privilege and courageous conversations.

EWSD will explore and implement engagement strategies for community members who are historically and presently underrepresented in engagement activities. EWSD will prioritize listening to people's experiences and believing those experiences with the school district toward improving engagement and outcomes toward a sense of belonging and support

Goal E: Support and retain educators, administration, and staff from marginalized groups.

Procedure: EWSD will develop a recruiting and hiring practice that centers on current research to diversify the workforce. All hiring committees will implement anti-bias hiring practices. Support for staff will be provided to support retention, including mentoring programs that consider individual identity and needs of staff and affinity spaces for staff. These opportunities will be made clear during onboarding.

EAC Recommended Action Steps

Equity and inclusion will be a central strategy in the development of all HR hiring, recruitment, and retention practices. EWSD will ensure an anti-bias hiring process is designed around all open positions. This will include ensuring training for all committees as well as a focused effort to diversify the applicant pool for EWSD positions.

EWSD will collect data related to the experiences of employees in underrepresented categories. This data will be presented to EWSD leadership annually.

EWSD will engage in considering equity in the context of master agreement negotiation as well as in selecting employee benefits.

Affinity groups will be available for EWSD faculty and staff to be in community, offer support to one another, and learn together.

EWSD onboarding will include supporting access to mentoring, affinity groups, and other resources to support underrepresented staff.

Goal F: Ensures school environments reflect, appreciate, welcome, and protect diverse personal cultural expressions and experiences, including through food, language, music, art, and clothing.

Procedure: EWSD will conduct regular reviews of library collections, classroom texts, and other text materials in schools for representation of those historically and currently excluded. EWSD will also do regular training and revision of practices considered cultural appropriation. Food, art, dress codes, and traditions will be considered and implemented using an equity lens in all schools from both a review of what has been in place as well as a review of new opportunities in the future.

EAC Recommended Action Steps

EWSD will curate books in the school libraries and curriculums that represent the peoples and cultures of the world, especially those historically and currently excluded. EWSD will uplift and highlight authors, characters, and cultures marginalized and historically excluded.

Students and families will be included in decisions about how the school district celebrates non-dominant traditions as well as how food and art are represented at the school.

Training on cultural appropriation and tokenism will be built into the district's DEI training for all employees. Issues of cultural appropriation will be reported as bias incidents and considered through an equity lens.

The district will undertake an analysis of food, music and artistic representation of cultures. Barriers to accessing food and culture at school will be removed to the extent possible under the law.

The school district will audit the art being taught and portrayed in classes and in schools in order to diversify the art represented in EWSD schools.

Goal G: Inform how EWSD schools celebrate and recognize cultural practices.

Procedure: EWSD will maintain and distribute a calendar representing global cultures, religions, traditions, and celebrations. This calendar will provide teachers with resources to use in classrooms and will be highlighted across the year in EWSD communications. Families and students will be able to share their views on the inclusion of cultural practices annually.

EAC Recommended Action Steps

The district will develop a three-year rotational calendar to center a variety of days and celebrations to enhance all student's experiences. This calendar will reference all days to be recognized across the district. The district will undertake a review of how the current calendar impacts people who celebrate days not represented in the Christian and US calendars that dominate the current design of calendars.

EWSD will administer an annual climate survey that includes a focus on belonging and DEI. These results will be shared publicly and used to consider areas of focus for continuous improvement planning. EWSD will consider requests for access to support for non-dominant faiths and cultures without using the dominant default as a factor. EWSD will consider requests for access to support for non-dominant faiths and cultures without using the dominant default as a factor.

Goal H: Describe methods to ensure faculty/staff/administrator understanding, growth and development as anti-racist, culturally agile, proficient, and responsive educators to create visibility and respect for all students in their educational environments in developmentally sensitive ways.

Procedure: EWSD will develop an annual professional development (PD) plan to ensure forward movement toward the Equity Policy goals and to develop anti-bias classrooms and school environments. Areas of focus will include annual mandatory training for all employees that is comprehensive and also tailored to their individual roles. Ongoing leadership training will be a component of the PD plan. Substitute teacher training will include a review of the equity policy and implicit bias training. Feedback on growth related to student experiences will inform the success of these learning efforts.

EAC Recommended Action Steps

EWSD will embrace a universal design for learning across all classrooms and ensure that all teachers practice culturally sustaining pedagogies. These practices are designed to help ensure access to educational content and process as well as be sensitive to and inclusive of all student needs. Representation of students in classrooms will be prioritized.

Students will have annual opportunities to express what is and is not working in their classrooms and schools and to share feedback with their teachers. Students will be given regular opportunities to have a voice in the design of their learning opportunities in their classrooms. EWSD will ensure annual community conversation design with students to engage teachers and students in relationships and collective community building at all schools.

Teachers will have opportunities to engage in affinity group work to enhance their own knowledge of themselves and others. This will include antiracism groups for people benefiting from whiteness. EWSD will center on building diversity within its curriculum and hiring practices as a core value.

EWSD will maintain a list of mandatory trainings that align with the following practices: a) culturally sustaining/responsive pedagogies, b) implicit bias, c) restorative practices, d) understanding equity in EWSD. EWSD will provide training to staff to support engaging in courageous conversations about race, culture and identity. EWSD will create opportunities for students to discuss and share cultural experiences and information about global cultures through curriculum and celebrations.

EWSD will implement training and accountability structures to support the essential understanding to implement all curriculum and classroom environments through an equity lens and to teach concepts of antiracism, LGBTQIA+ affirmation, the value of diversity, anti-discrimination, and justice.

EWSD will ensure all substitute teachers have training related to the EWSD Equity Policy prior to being approved as an EWSD Substitute. This will include awareness related to expectations of antiracism, LGBTQIA + affirming practices, disability support and awareness, practices related to multilingual students, and an understanding of the impact on socio-economic challenges for students and families. Restorative

practices will also be included.

To become a substitute teacher, training in equity and student-centered practices will be required. Of specific importance is the use of appropriate pronouns for students, implicit bias, and recognizing assumptions based on visible attributes of individual students. Teachers will always provide sub plans that include all necessary accommodations for students with disabilities. Training will also include conflict resolution with students.

EWSD will create proactive learning spaces (communities of practice) for teachers to learn how to reduce bias incidents and are collaborative with each other to develop shared values and a culture of shared responsibility toward inclusion and belonging for all.

Goal I: EWSD will apply a transparent equity process to policies, procedures and practices throughout the district in all decision making and monitoring.

Procedure: EWSD will require all leaders to consider equity during decision-making processes at the school and district levels. The school board will review a set of questions related to ensuring equity in decision-making prior to passing policies. Examples of these questions include:

- How is an equity lens incorporated within the policy/procedure and the accountability measures?
- Will the policy/procedure increase access and opportunity for communities of color and other marginalized communities?
- How will the policy/procedure have a positive impact on the racial/ethnic equity, inclusion, and full participation of all people?
- Are there changes that could be made to make the policy/procedure more equitable and inclusive?
- What are the economic and social benefits of incorporating an equity lens in this policy/procedure?

EAC Recommended Action Steps

The EWSD school board and administration will ask the following questions for all policies and procedures developed in the system: How is an equity lens incorporated within the policy/procedure and the measures of accountability? Will the policy/procedure increase access and opportunity for communities of color and other marginalized communities? How? Will the policy/procedure have a positive impact on racial/ethnic equity, inclusion, and full participation of all people? Will the policy/procedure have a positive impact on racial/ethnic equity, inclusion and full participation of all people? Are there changes that could be made to make the policy/procedure more equitable and inclusive? Are there changes that could be made to make the policy/procedure more equitable and inclusive? What are the economic and social benefits of incorporating an equity lens in this policy/procedure? EWSD will provide communication of policies and procedures through accessible means.

The Equity Advisory Committee will develop an annual report and share that outcome with the community. This process will also seek feedback from other community members.

EWSD will ensure a no-wrong-door approach to concerns shared by students, parents, and community members. Concerns will be addressed through established problem solving and complaint processes and procedures with a genuine interest in improvement.