

MOVING TOWARD EQUITY

Webster Groves School District

Since 2001, the Webster Groves School District has expressed and demonstrated a commitment to creating an equitable learning environment for all children, staff, and families. While progress has been made, much work is left to be done, which led the Board of Education to adopt a resolution in the spring of 2017 that acknowledges the equity gap that remains between the current learning environment and the one to which we aspire. The resolution also states values and beliefs which must be central to our work moving forward.

In order to change the pattern of better serving certain groups of children, we must disrupt traditional beliefs, systems, structures, and practices which favor those privileged by race, economics, gender, etc. Traditional ways will continue to yield traditional results. Thus, in addition to the beliefs and values outlined in the Equity Resolution, we must hold true to our district vision which calls us to innovate or think and act differently. Doing so will allow us to better support children as they engage in this important time of self-discovery and help empower them with the beliefs, knowledge, and skills to flourish in a global society. Cultivating such a school environment isn't just good for some children, it's good for all children.

Highlighted below are many of the district and building-level strategies initiated this year in order to help move us toward a system that benefits everyone. While every microstrategy or effort can't be listed, many of the major efforts under way or will be under way soon are. In order to be attentive to the ever-changing needs of our students and the world in which they live, we will remain fluid, flexible, and adaptable with our strategies and agile in our approach. For this reason, the list will remain in draft form and we will add to it, moving forward.

Trust that we know these strategies or actions, as well as those initiated prior to the 17-18 school year (not listed), aren't enough to help us get where we need to be with equity. However, we do believe they're contributing to movement in the right direction. We'll continue to learn, grow, and act in support of our organization's positive momentum.

District Level Work - Current

Curricular

- The Gifted Curriculum revision process began this year and will be finalized next year, with the goal of ensuring we are meeting the enrichment needs of all of our students, and not creating barriers to access for some of our students.
- The Library Media Curriculum revision process will be reviewed during the 2018-2019 school year to develop ways our Library Media Specialists and spaces can meet the needs of all of our students through innovative instruction.
- The Health/Guidance Curriculum will start a revision process to determine ways that we can meet the National Health Education Standards set out by the CDC (and promoted by DESE), cover the Characteristics of an Effective Health Curriculum, and determine where some of these topics can be handled through our Guidance Curriculum, to ensure all of our students are receiving solid instruction about not only their physical health and development, but their social/emotional health and development as well.
- The Webster Groves High School course manual has been revised to eliminate unnecessary pre-requisites and grade requirements for students.
- High school students will participate in a course selection week in January, rather than have the core teachers make their course recommendations for them.
- The addition of an Advanced College Credit African-American Literature and Composition course will increase the opportunity for a wide range of diverse students to read texts from African-American authors.
- The addition of the The Real-World Problem Solving: Survivor class, in partnership with Webster University, will connect students to the real world impact of poverty and other issues facing our community, nation, and world.
- The ability to appeal a high school course suggestion by a teacher is being made explicit to all students.
- Explicit discussions are occurring around 8th grade teacher recommendations for incoming freshmen to ensure students of color are provided equal access to regular and advanced track classes.

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- The high school counselors will try to schedule students of color together in advanced track classes to create student support groups.
 - In partnership with St. Louis Community College, we are developing an Early College Partnership specifically for underrepresented students, allowing them to graduate with a high school diploma and Associate's Degree.
 - Increasing unique opportunities such as St. Louis Caps and AMPED (Algebra I and Manufacturing, Processes, Entrepreneurship and Design) to provide additional opportunities for students.
 - Increase team and department meeting frequency (from monthly to weekly) to discuss disparities in student performance and strategies to offset such disparities.
 - Partnering with community to produce a Black History Month program to bring awareness to the North Webster community.
 - In collaboration with the tutoring program at Webster Rock Hill Ministries, the district has employed a liaison to work with the program's tutors and the children's teachers at school.
 - We have opened up summer school opportunities for all students who want to participate in summer learning.
 - We have partnered with Peace United Church of Christ's summer Freedom School, sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, which provides six weeks of full-day instruction centered on reading and social advocacy.
 - Starting in 7th grade, students will be allowed to take Algebra I as an elective class and/or "test out" of the regular 7th/8th grade math curriculum, rather than meet an already established standard in order to take Algebra I.
 - Webster Groves is a partner in the 13th Annual Educators for Social Justice Conference.
 - Through a partnership with Local Farmers Insurance Agent, Andrew Chao, schools across the district are receiving We Stories Kits that families may check out in support of literacy and talking with children about race.
 - Schools are developing lists of students who would benefit from additional tutoring support before or after school in the areas of math and reading and identifying those students who would be eligible to receive transportation home from the tutoring sessions in order to determine the financial viability of doing so.

Professional Development

- Implementation of Professional Learning Community Academy through EdPlus at schools in order to focus on data-driven decision making.
- Additional Anti-Racism staff training will begin during the 2018-2019 school year
- The Reverend Starsky Wilson, pastor of Saint John's Church, president and CEO of Deaconess Foundation, and former co-chair of the Ferguson Commission, spoke to district staff on creating a more equitable school system and community.
- District staff engaged in professional learning related to implicit bias, and how we all have biases that we need to acknowledge and work to eliminate within our daily interactions.
- Year two faculty and other staff and community participated in a four-day social justice workshop focused on developing and/or deepening their understanding of privilege and oppression, and the role each plays in their lives and the lives of others including their students.
- Over 50 district staff participated in the annual social justice book club which this year included the books: *Whatever it Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America*; *Small Great Things*; *Hillbilly Elegy*; *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* and *The Passion-Driven Classroom*.
- Staff from multiple schools and the central administration participated in a multi-day, regional workshop in support of understanding and analyzing systemic racism and bias.
- Approximately 40 district staff participated in a multi-day, project-based learning workshop facilitated by The Buck Institute in the spring of 2017, and another cohort of teachers will be trained during the spring of 2018. Two days of additional intermediate training will be provided for those teachers who went through the initial training in order to provide ongoing support for their implementation of Project-Based Learning in their classrooms.
- The Columbia Teachers College will provide training for Lucy Caulkins' Reading and Writing Units of Study for our teachers this summer.
- Exploring ways to bring a poverty simulation to all staff to kick off Professional Development for the 2018-2019 school year.

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- Certified preschool through high school staff have engaged in learning cohorts this year focused on a topic of choice. Some of the cohorts include:
 - Democratic Learning - Practical suggestions to bring student voice and choice into the classroom
 - Introduction to Project-Based Learning - What is PBL, what are the essential components, and how to start
 - Intermediate Project-Based Learning - After initial training and implementation, what are the next steps in PBL?
 - Math Workshop Model - How to meet the needs of individual students during math instruction
 - Reading and Writing Units of Study - Build the literacy capacity in your students using the methods and ideas of Lucy Calkins
 - Responsive Spaces - How changing instructional practices drives classroom reconfiguration
 - STEM / STEAM - Explore how STEAM can be integrated with current standards to increase student inquiry, engagement, and relevance

Data Usage

- Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), a tool primarily used to monitor student academic progress in reading and math, is in year two of implementation at the elementary level, year one of implementation at Steger, and will be initiated at Hixson in 2018-2019.
- District leadership is collecting and monitoring a variety of learning and participation data for African-American students for the purpose of supporting schools in their work with children and families.
- Students are participating in a MAP practice exam in order to help school teams better understand what children know and/or don't know and to help inform curricula for district leadership.
- Currently exploring data warehouse systems/dashboards in support of more efficient and effective use of data at the district and school levels.

Equity Budget

In an effort to support emerging equity needs, the district created a specific equity line item of \$20,000. A portion of this money has been used to support access to wireless internet for students receiving free/reduced lunch.

Equity in Education Committee

- Using an intentionally designed equity protocol, diverse teams of adults entered each district building to evaluate how each is inviting and inclusive for all. Following a walkthrough of the school, interactions with staff, review of documents, and meeting with administrators, the team gave both quantitative and qualitative feedback and suggestions to the school.
- Twenty students from Avery, Steger, Hixson, and WGHS, who each currently receive free/reduced lunch, are piloting use of a wireless hotspot. The results of the pilot will determine whether to expand the offerings in 2018-2019.
- Students trained by the Anti-Defamation League used the different lessons they learned and/or created with the members of the EIE committee to showcase the work they will be conducting with their classmates.
- Feedback was received from committee members on their concerns about issues surrounding curriculum and instruction.
- Another student survey will be given to assess students' feelings of belonging, respect, and their place in our school system.

Talent Acquisition, Development, and Support

- The administrator evaluation is being changed in order to allow development of administrators to be more efficient and effective, and better aligned with the district's mission, vision, and values.
- The Performanced-Based Teacher Evaluation Committee is assessing the current teacher evaluation tool and its use to determine whether the tool is aligned with our

beliefs and goals, and whether or not it provides teachers with efficient and effective feedback in support of their continued growth and development.

- Developing partnerships with universities and colleges in order to form relationships with prospective teachers of color prior to and including senior year
- Partnering with Webster University in order to develop a “Grow Your Own (Teachers) Program” in support of diversifying our teaching staff.
- A plan will be presented later this year articulating goals and strategies the district will initiate in order to recruit, hire, and develop a more diverse certified faculty. The plan will include:
 - Hosting an annual WGSD Shares event for diverse, certified staff seeking employment (1st meeting: January 13, 2018 at Steger/Computer School from 9 - 12:00 pm). Prospective staff will learn about our district while we learn about them.
 - Hosting a Diversity Hiring Fair in late winter/early spring.
 - Strategies for better supporting staff of color through the hiring process and once hired
 - Learning how to eliminate or reduce bias throughout the interview process including in the questions asked and experiences had
 - Learning how to support interview teams in confronting their bias when it “shows up” during interview processes
 - A streamlined process for annually acquiring student teachers reflective of our student population

Student Services and Support

- Fifteen district staff members (PK-12) attended the fall national Trauma-Informed Conference that was held in St. Louis in November. We’re currently working with Alive and Well STL to schedule onsite training in the district.
- The district became a member of Character Plus at the start of the school year. Character Plus provides staff development, training, and student programming in restorative practices, trauma-informed schools, character education and equity.

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- In November, Diane Sterling from Character Plus provided a full day of training in restorative practices to school-based teams. Additionally, Hudson, Edgar Road and Bristol are participating in the Restorative Academy Workshops through Character Plus, and Hixson is implementing restorative circles.
 - Staff at WGHS developed a sensitivity training program which has been used to help educate students violating school rules related to bias or harassment.
 - Student Discipline Policy JG will be revised in support of more developmentally appropriate consequences across preK-12. Included in these additions will be a recommendation to eliminate out-of-school suspensions in grades K-3 unless mandated by the Safe Schools Act or the incident causes a significant safety concern.
 - The School Resource Officer (SRO) Memorandum of Understanding is being updated to provide better clarity as to the role and responsibilities of the SRO.

Community Connections

- Through a partnership with We Stories, district staff and community were invited to hear Ali Michael, noted author and director of the Race Institute for K-12 Educators, speak regarding how to talk about race with white children.
- We opened up the PBL training (referenced above) to Webster University practicum students who in turn served internships throughout our district elementary summer school program.
- Meet the Superintendent events hosted in various communities.
- The superintendent and district's commitment to equity is evidenced by the content regularly shared on the superintendent's blog and twitterfeed.

Communication/Public Relations

- Our Facebook page is regularly including a Teacher Feature on individual teachers and administrators that will reflect staff diversity.

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- As student success stories and other news come up, we include information about the students' home communities. We also send news to city governments so it can be included in their newsletters.

Other

- The district calendar committee is considering holidays from many religious faiths, including Jewish and Muslim, in setting the 19-20 district calendar. In addition, district staff received a calendar containing diverse religious holidays and was encouraged to be mindful of these events when planning assessments and other experiences for students.
- Two students have served as advisors to the Board of Education.
- We're working with local community members and area preschools in support of equity of access to early childhood education for all of the district community's children.

Building Level Work - Current

Preschool through Sixth Grade

- A Diaper Bank has been awarded to the district in conjunction with Webster-Rock Hill Ministries to support families identified with a diaper need. Free diapers are available to families which stretches limited family resources for food, rent, utilities and other essentials.
- Scholarships have been made available to children who qualify financially for free/greatly reduced tuition in the half-day preschool program. Information has been shared with principals, counselors, social workers, and other families.
- Staff are engaging in a collaborative process to deepen our understanding of the family center's Vision, Mission and Beliefs to determine if and/or how they truly address issues of inequity within our community. Action steps will follow.

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- Staff are committed to attend Crossroads' Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist (ABAR) two and a half day training focused on understanding and analyzing systemic racism. Thus far, 11 of 26 certified staff members have attended the training. The goal is that by 2019, all certified staff members will have attended the ABAR training.
 - Staff formed a committee to vet for equity and enrich classroom books and school assemblies.
 - In January, the PTO will appoint someone to a newly created equity position in order to help the organization think through equity issues and provide opportunities for communal learning. The Equity Officer will look at the practices/events of the PTO to examine if they are equitable to all. This position will also bring learning opportunities to PTO meetings to explore matters of race.
 - We have purchased We Stories literature for both classrooms and families in support of conversations about race and held an evening event to share on this topic.
 - A school team has participated in the four-day Restorative Practices Academy.
 - Working to ensure that equity is a part of our daily lens by including articles, books, and conversations as a part of the Weekly Staff News and staff/grade level team meetings.
 - We had a staff book study using Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People. Due to the rich learning that occurred as a result of this shared experience, the group will select a new book to read and discuss in the winter/spring semester.
 - The entire staff is being trained in restorative practices. Multiple Staff Learning times will be used to discuss restorative practices to include the use of restorative circles in the classroom.
 - We Stories Kits are available for family check-out in the library. As we work to update libraries and guided reading sets, we are focusing on topics and content that are more reflective of our students and more diverse in nature.
 - Staff have participated in several social justice professional development opportunities both district and building level, with many opportunities planned for the rest of the year.
 - We're working with Crossroads to provide staff and parents with anti-racism/anti-bias training in August 2018. We hope to open up this training to other schools and local organization.

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- We've been working on the design of a new building-level schedule for 18-19 that will support teams and departments in meeting more frequently (from monthly to weekly) to plan and problem-solve for students needing support.
 - Partnering with the community to produce a Black History Month program to help bring awareness to the rich history of the North Webster community.
 - Staff continues to look for new ways to connect with our underrepresented community members.
 - Staff walks with students to North Webster each afternoon to strengthen connections with students.
 - We initiated a staff diversity committee and a parent equity committee.
 - Initiated a "One Book, One School" program in order to provide students, staff, and families with the opportunity to engage in activities designed to help everyone become more comfortable talking about differences such as race and issues such as racism. Thanks to securing a Major Foundation Grant, we will facilitate a variety of activities using multiple books during the 17-18 school year.
 - Over twenty teachers will be attending the Witnessing Whiteness Program beginning in January.
 - We will host a Family Reading Night to introduce We Stories to our community. There will also be a local artist unveiling the mural he painted in the school as part of the One Book, One School concept. All activities for the evening will focus on family, literacy, and community building.
 - This year we offered "buddy rides" for after-school enrichment activities that begin in January. When families signed students up for classes, they had the option to "offer" a ride and "ask" for a ride.

Middle School through High School

- The student social justice club has events scheduled for the third week in January including an assembly. The Amnesty International Club is also planning an activity for this special week.
- The No Place For Hate Committee will better coordinate all the anti-bias/anti-racism work taking place at the school.

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- An all-school assembly will take place the first week of second semester in order to denounce acts of discrimination and state efforts under way to help the school become more just and inclusive.
 - This month, the students participating in the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) group will begin leading learning opportunities in classrooms at WGHS and beyond.
 - Faculty choose a learning strand and attend during faculty meetings:
 - Equity through Restorative Practices
 - Equity through Trauma Informed Care
 - We created the Hixson Leadership Academy which this year will include:
 - Student leaders supporting the transition to Hixson for sixth grade students by designing a lesson to be implemented via transition circles at Steger this spring.
 - We've initiated a Student Summit focused on equity and voice for change. On April 6, middle school student leaders from the school districts of Clayton, Normandy, Parkway, Ritenour, and Maplewood-Richmond Heights will come together to share common conversations around the inequities they face in their communities and to give them a platform to work towards solutions.
 - We're looking at data not just for remediation but looking at kids that can be pushed to advance in math.
 - We've designed a new schedule for the 18-19 school year that will allow teams to meet during the school day two times per week for data-driven instructional learning meetings.
 - We've started developing and implementing a character culture.
 - We're developing an intentional thread of equity through the ELA and SS curriculum for implementation during the 18-19 school year.