

African-American Equity Task Force Guidelines and Recommendations

Since its inception, the African-American Equity Task Force (AAETF) has had unprecedented and active participation, from both Denver Public School (DPS) staff and community members, in monthly meetings, public forums, focus groups and interviews. Soliciting public input throughout the seven-month process, the AAETF has engaged in deep, authentic and meaningful internal and community-based conversations.

Based on these thoughtful and robust conversations, as well as extensive research into ongoing disparities and root causes, the working groups have developed specific recommendations for defined *levers of impact* that will enable DPS to more effectively address opportunity and achievement gaps for African-American students and educators. Based on these levers of impact, the recommendations have been grouped into the following:

- I. District and School Structures to Promote Equity
- II. Culturally Responsive Instruction, Engagement and Communication
- III. Targeted Supports for Students
- IV. Community and Family Resources
- V. Equitable Employment Practices and Work Environments

To sustain and buttress these specific recommendations, the AAETF Steering Committee proposes the following guiding principles and overarching recommendation that will ensure accountability, transparency and success in the implementation of the AAETF recommendations.

Guiding Principles

Achieving equity for African-American students and educators will require intentional and targeted outreach to African-American communities with the aim of establishing *deep, authentic and trusting relationships*. Through these relationships, DPS must work to build *equitable partnerships* with African-American students, families and educators, as well as partnerships founded on *inclusion, voice and shared ownership* in the design, implementation and oversight of all efforts and initiatives that directly affect African-Americans. Moreover, DPS must commit to *continuous improvement* to progress monitoring the impacts of its efforts on an ongoing basis, and to responsively adapting these efforts to meet the changing needs of African-American students and educators.

Overarching Recommendation

Recommendation 1: The AAETF recommends that Denver Public Schools provide funding for the creation of an African-American Equity Team that will insure the African-American Equity Agreement is upheld, effectively implemented and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

There is a clear need for a formal structure, spearheaded by DPS, to insure the effective execution and continuous review of the AAETF recommendations. The structure should develop, support, oversee and progress monitor an action plan for replicating successful models in schools and departments that are struggling to foster success for African-American students and employees. Additionally, they will ensure broad, inclusive and consistent communication about the progress of the recommendations below.

Specific Actions:

1. Identify support structure
2. Hire for lead of the equity work

I. District and School Structures to Promote Equity

Recommendation 1: We recommend that every school and department creates and publicly disseminates an Equity Plan that outlines both its commitment to equity and its plan to address inequity for African-American students and employees.

Designed to strengthen relationships between African-Americans and schools, the proposed school-level Equity Plans should be developed with community input and should be targeted to address the specific needs, interests and goals of African-American students, families and community members.

Specific Actions:

1. Home and community visits should be a central component of all Equity Plans with training for all schools and teachers in the Parent Teacher Home Visit Program (PTHVP)
2. Conduct ongoing assessments of the impact of these visits
3. Develop Personalized Plans for every African-American student
4. Focus on wrap-around supports (Social Emotional Learning)
5. Addresses disproportionate discipline practices
6. Create and implement lessons using Culturally Responsive Curriculum
7. Identify opportunities for central support departments to be actively engaged in schools

Recommendation 2: We recommend that DPS adapt and expand the SPF Equity Indicator to integrate additional data that provide a more robust understanding of a school's "equity performance." This additional data is crucial for effective school-level progress monitoring and accountability related to equity for African-American students and other marginalized groups.

In addition to student performance data, a school's Equity Indicator should reflect the following: teacher hiring, retention, promotion and non-renewal data; school climate data, discipline data; school-specific efforts related to equity; student and family experiences; and Whole Child efforts. To achieve "Green" status within the SPF, a school must be "Green" on this more robust Equity Indicator.

II. Culturally Responsive Instruction, Engagement and Communication

Recommendation 1: We recommend that DPS develop and implement systems to support consistent and ongoing professional development focused on improving instruction, engagement and communication with African-American students, families and community members.

Required for all employees, this multi-year “continuum of competency” curriculum should integrate the following key themes: self-awareness and skill-building around race, class, bias and judgement, cultural responsiveness and social emotional intelligence. We advise that this curriculum emphasize adaptive practices – shifting awareness, mindsets and behaviors — rather than static understandings of equity. We further suggest that the curriculum include customized school-level and individual-level supports, such as coaching, to ensure that additional resources are provided where there is greatest need.

DPS must monitor and evaluate the impacts of this curriculum using multiple metrics (e.g. discipline data), as well as through surveys with students, parents and school-based staff.

Specific Actions:

1. Create a shared definition of Culturally Responsive Instruction and Education

Recommendation 2: We recommend that DPS ensure curricular materials are culturally responsive to African-American students.

With the input of African-American educators, families and students, DPS should develop a rubric for the evaluating the cultural responsiveness of curricular materials. Using this rubric, the district should conduct initial and ongoing audits to assess all schools’ cultural responsiveness to African-American students. Where gaps in responsiveness are observed, DPS should identify and adopt culturally relevant curricular materials.

III. Targeted Supports for Students

Recommendation 1: We recommend that DPS develop and implement an African-American Equitable Access Plan that increases African-American students' access to high value learning opportunities such as: Advanced Placement (AP), Gifted, Talented (GT/Honors), Concurrent Enrollment, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math (STEM/STEAM), CareerConnect, International Baccalaureate (IB), Middle Year Programming (MYP), student leadership and magnet programs.

The Equitable Access Plan should prioritize providing academically rigorous and culturally responsive learning opportunities in closer proximity to African-American communities. The highest priority regions should be the Far Northeast (FNE) and Near Northeast (NNE), which lack high values learning opportunities that meet the needs and interests of African-American students.

Specific Actions:

1. Evaluate current state of program offerings by school
2. Conduct a stakeholder survey to understand specific needs of African-American males
3. Provide teachers with additional support to accelerate the learning of low-performing students
4. Provide additional push-in support, where needed

IV. Community and Family Resources

Recommendation 1: We recommend that DPS establish Community and Family Opportunity Centers (CFOs) that respond to and serve African-American students and families living in Far Northeast and Near Northeast neighborhoods.

Modeled after the current CFO framework in the Southwest region, we believe additional CFOs could play a crucial role in facilitating partnerships with African-American community members, as well as with community organizations that have expertise in supporting African-American families. We suggest that these CFOs provide year-round academic, social, and structural resources and supports for students, families and community members. We strongly encourage DPS to develop and implement ongoing assessments to measure the effectiveness of these CFOs in meeting the needs of African-American families and community members.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that DPS create school-level and district-level Black Family Advisory Councils that give voice to the goals, needs and concerns of African-American students, families and community members.

To ensure broad and deep participation from the African-American community, Black Family Advisory Councils should be charged with developing feedback and engagement systems and structures that accommodate the needs of African-American families (e.g. provision of childcare, welcoming signage, etc.). Among other activities, the Advisory Councils should develop and promote opportunities that empower African-American families, such as the Black Family Leadership Institute, technology training, etc. We encourage DPS to charge the FACE team with developing accountability measures to ensuring that schools partner effectively with the Black Family Advisory Councils.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that DPS design and disseminate a supportive assessment and planning tool that assists African-American students and families in successfully navigating the school process at all levels, ECE through 12th grade.

Accessible both online and in-person, this assessment and planning tool should be designed to help African-American families make informed decisions that best serve their students. More specifically, the tool should assist African-American families in understanding how their student's needs, learning styles and interests align with available school and program models. Ultimately, the tool should generate personalized recommendations and plans for each student. As needed, follow-up support from within, from family liaisons and/or teachers, should be provided.

V. Equitable Employment Practices and Work Environments

Recommendation 1: We recommend that DPS create a district-led HR Task Force responsible for the development, implementation and oversight of equitable recruitment, hiring, promotion, renewal, and compensation processes and practices.

This HR Task Force should engage in ongoing assessments of school and district-level data and practices related to hiring, retention, promotion, renewal, and compensation. The team should also participate in school hiring committees to ensure that these committees are diverse, that African-American candidates receive equal consideration, and that all school leader candidates demonstrate cultural competence and a compelling theory of leadership related to equity for African-Americans. We further suggest that this HR Task Force investigate disparities in pay across race, ethnicity, and gender, and take steps to ensure equitable, clear and transparent pay structures. Finally, this HR Task Force should oversee the development of an internal pipeline of African-American educators and educational leaders. Charter schools should not be exempt from any of the HR Task Force's activities.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that DPS develop both systems and structures to attract and retain African-American educators.

In recognition of the tremendous need for more African-American teachers and teacher leaders in DPS, we urge the district to put in place systems and structures that focus on providing incentives to attract and retain African-American teachers and prospective teachers (e.g. signing bonuses, housing allocations, scholarships, etc.); and creating pipeline programs focused on certifying African-American students within DPS and incentivizing them to return to serve their own communities.

Specific Actions:

1. Establish employee resource groups for members of isolated groups
2. Partner with city to create supports to attract African-American employees