



## **Cultural Competency, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion North Star document**

Educators in the Monroe School District are constantly striving to improve the quality of learning for every student. Yet not all students benefit equally from these efforts. Specifically, there are major disparities in outcomes between student groups from a diverse set of ethnic backgrounds. The mission of Cultural Competency, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CCDEI) work is to eliminate these inequitable results in academics, health, safety and in the development of a strong learner identity.

### **Problems of Student Learning**

Monroe School District demographics have undergone a profound change in the last two decades. The most rapidly changing growing populations are our students who are Hispanic/Latino, or identified as Low-Income. From 2007 to present, our Hispanic/Latino population has grown from 12.9% (920 students) to 25.7% (1652 students). Conversely, the population of White students has decreased since 2007, from 78.5% (5,597 students) to 62.4% (3794 students). The rate of students identified as low-income has also increased since 2008, from 18.7% (1,333 students) to 35.2% (2,140 students). Our district has also seen smaller increases in students who are Multilingual or identified as two or more races.

Presently, Monroe has experienced a positive increase of student diversity, with 38% of students coming from communities of color vs. 62% White students. Indicators in some areas show that students from all subgroups are doing equally well in areas such as discipline rates and student survey data illustrating the connection to school and the quality of relationships to adults. These are strengths and demonstrate a foundation of community that we can build on.

However, academic measures such as assessment results, 4 year-graduation rates, 9<sup>th</sup> grade on-track indicators and Kindergarten readiness show that there are between 10-15% differences in achievement between some of our largest ethnic groups (OSPI Report Card Data) .

Further, anecdotal data from our schools suggest the disturbing development of racially based tensions. Harassment, intimidation, and bullying discipline incidents involving demeaning treatment based on ethnicity and gender have been a feature of life at some schools . Conflicts have been exacerbated through social media use. Common-place and casual use of racist ethnic slurs as well as demeaning treatment of LGBTQIA+ and students with disabilities at the secondary level have been reported by students. The ongoing presence of these negative occurrences erode the feeling of safety and belonging of many Monroe students.

### **Problems of Adult Practice**

The relatively recent diversification of the Monroe community, while a positive development, have revealed challenges. In our school district, despite a deep level of caring for our students, there is wide variability in the knowledge and skill of adults in building harmony amidst the diverse ethnic and cultural diversity of schools and a sense of belonging by all students. A part of the difficulty in acclimating to our demographic transformation lies in the mismatch between the ethnic profile of Monroe educators and our current student population. While almost 40% of our Monroe students come from communities of color, our classroom teacher population is over 93% White.

Anecdotal data suggests that many Monroe educators feel uncomfortable managing tensions and acting to bridge racial and ethnic divisions. Among both school leaders and teachers, there is fear of making missteps that will end up making conflicts worse.

But experience from many communities and districts shows that despite the presence of ethnic and racial differences between educators and students, with proactive, on-going, and intentional knowledge and skill building, school districts can develop healthy and harmonious learning environments and reduce racist and gender-based harassment, intimidation and bullying. The converse is also true, that when the approach is used of minimizing or pretending there are no difficulties or hoping that by doing nothing, issues will simply go away, problems evolve into nasty and complicated situations. Instead of promoting growth of a positive culture, debilitating, reactive damage control becomes the default response. Clearly our adult educators strongly desire to build their capacity to better serve our Monroe students.

### **Call to action**

As inequities exist at all grade levels and schools, a systemic and systematic approach is needed to unify our school district community. It will take the engagement and effort of all of us to accomplish the task of every student succeeding to their highest potential, and every student having safety and a strong sense of belonging. Equitable access, high expectations and powerful instruction for all is a priority, as is a reduction of incidences of harassment, intimidation, bullying and demeaning treatment. The Monroe School District (MSD) Board of Directors has made firm commitments that being anti-racist, and eliminating racial inequities, discrimination, and institutional bias will increase achievement and graduation rates for our students while closing achievement and opportunity gaps. The Monroe Education Association (MEA) has also committed to this work by including in its bargaining agreement with the District the charge of developing collaboration toward a shared vision and implementing specific steps toward racial equity. Monroe's CCDEI work will focus on learning and capacity building—knowledge and skill of the responsible adults--of all parts of our system—i.e., central office staff, principals, teachers, supportive community members—to help Monroe students develop a resilient learner identity, attain social-emotional growth, and achieve academic success.

### **Recommendations**

**#1—A permanent and ongoing advisory committee**—Form a “guiding coalition” with a clear purpose, charge and parameters, representative of major stakeholders that provide recommendations for CCDEI learning and action for the larger District system.

**#2—Foundational leadership learning**—To build long-range leadership capacity, take immediate steps to initiate activities such as required reading for administrators over the summer on racial equity

**#3—Executive sponsorship**—To ensure that CCDEI work is integrated with the core work of the District, create and maintain close organizational communication and connection with District and Monroe Education Association leadership: specifically Superintendent's Cabinet, the District Labor-Management Groups (LMG) and the School Board.

**#4—Developing an initial data set to create urgency and provide a continuing rationale for CCDEI**—Both quantitative and qualitative data should be combined into a point of reference that clearly illustrates the urgency and justification for ongoing diversity, equity and inclusion work.

**#5—Review and recommend an equity crisis plan**—As an immediate short-term response to incidents and paralleling other crisis planning, the equity crisis plan would spell out planned responses for racial and other types of bias incidents.