

## Lower Merion School District

Policy No.: 101  
Section: PROGRAMS  
Title: EQUITY  
Date Adopted: SECOND READING 6/14/21

### 101 EQUITY

#### Purpose

The Lower Merion School District is committed to providing a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment for all people. The District is also dedicated to ensuring that all students and employees have equitable access to the District's educational programs and activities.

Educational **equity** is a shared commitment to ensure that every student gets what they need to be successful. Practicing equity in this District means understanding the needs of individuals and positioning resources – including funding, programs, policies, initiatives, and supports – to target people's unique experiences and to provide for individual needs so that **achievement** and **opportunity gaps** are eliminated on personal and systemic levels.

Equity is distinct from equality. While equality entitles that everyone gets the same, equity requires that individuals get what they need.

This policy reflects the District's commitment to ensuring students, employees, or families who may have historically experienced opportunity or achievement gaps due to race, color, ethnicity, national origin, language, immigration status, sex assigned at birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, creed, or religion no longer encounter barriers. In light of social and historical context, this policy provides explicit permission to treat people differently when circumstances necessitate that something different needs to be done.

The value of equity is that the entire community benefits when individuals get what they need. This policy reflects the Board's support in ensuring equity for all individuals in the District. The Board authorizes the Superintendent or their designee to develop and promulgate regulations designed to ensure that structural barriers are confronted and dismantled in service of meeting the needs of all individuals.

The Board's equity statement (highlighted above) shall serve as the foundational structure upon which all aspects of the District's educational system are built and maintained. To this end, the Board is committed to ensuring that every student has access to an equitable experience within the District by adopting policies, procedures and practices to (1) dismantle institutional barriers that perpetuate inequitable outcomes, and (2) promote access and opportunities that benefit every student.

The Board is committed to using quantitative and qualitative disaggregated District, building-level, and individual student data to:

1. Direct the Superintendent and/or designee to identify and remove institutional barriers that result in **achievement** and/or **opportunity gaps** for students; and

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2. Implement policies, practices and procedures that ensure a student's educational success is neither predetermined or predicated by factors such as a student's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, student with identified disabilities, individual learning needs, social or economic status, or other identity related factors.

### **Definitions and Glossary of Other Relevant Terms**

**Achievement gaps** shall mean the academic disparities and/or differences between groups of students, as indicated through disproportionalities in academic indicators such as test scores, grade point average and graduation rates. [Source: PSBA Equity Toolkit]

**Anti-Racism (also Antiracist)** is the active and conscious work against racism. Since racism operates at multiple levels, being antiracist means making antiracist choices at the various levels - individual, interpersonal, and institutional - to eradicate racism from the structures and fabric of our society. [Source: National Museum of African American History & Culture, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist>]

**Cultural competency** shall mean an ability to effectively interact, work, and develop meaningful relationships with people of different cultural backgrounds and demonstrate a willingness to learn from and about other cultures and people of different cultural backgrounds. [Source: PDE Equity & Inclusion Toolkit - modified]

**Cultural proficiency** shall mean: (1) the level of knowledge-based skills and understanding that is required to successfully teach and interact with students and to work effectively with colleagues, families and communities from a variety of cultures by understanding and holding all forms of cultural differences in high esteem; (2) a continuing self-assessment of one's values, beliefs and biases grounded in respect toward individuals of other cultures; (3) an ongoing vigilance toward the dynamics of diversity, difference and power; and (4) the expansion of knowledge or cultural practices that recognize cultural bridges as going both ways. [Source: PDE Equity & Inclusion Toolkit - modified]

**Culturally responsive** shall mean the inclusion of students' cultural references in all aspects of learning, school experiences, the curriculum, and student engagement. [Source: PDE Equitable Practices Hub (<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/equityandinclusion/EPH/AcademicEquity/Classroom/Pages/default.aspx>); Center for the Collaborative Classroom "A Conversation about Instructional Equity" (<https://www.collaborativeclassroom.org/blog/a-conversation-about-instructional-equity-with-zaretta-hammond/>)] - modified]

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**Equitable resources** shall mean funding, programs, policies, initiatives, and supports that, consistent with budgetary limits, target each student’s unique background in order to promote every student having access to what they need to access a high-quality education and achieve success in school. [Source: Pennsylvania School Boards Association - modified]

**Equity** shall mean fairness achieved through the just distribution of resources based upon each individual student’s needs. [Source: Pennsylvania School Boards Association - modified]

**Equity lens** shall mean an intentional focus on assessing any disparate or unequal impact a program, practice, operation, decision or action may have on a student or group of students. [Source: PSBA Equity & Inclusion Toolkit – modified]

**Ethnicity** refers to the social characteristics that people may have in common, such as language, religion, regional background, culture, foods, etc. Ethnicity is revealed by the traditions one follows, a person’s native language, and so on. [Source: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/structural-racism-definition/>]

**Explicit bias** shall mean the actions, attitudes and beliefs about a person or group on a conscious level. [Source: PDE Equity & Inclusion Toolkit - modified]

**Implicit bias** shall mean the actions, attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in a subconscious manner. [Source: PDE Equity & Inclusion Toolkit - modified]

**Inclusion** shall mean engaging, valuing and respecting all groups (students, parents/guardians and other family members, community members, administrators, instructional and support personnel and other education stakeholders) and including all groups as equal partners in the education process. [Source: PDE Equity & Inclusion Toolkit - modified]

**Institutional barriers** shall mean school policies, procedures and practices that disadvantage or limit students or certain groups of students.

**Institutional Racism** refers to the policies and practices within and across institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favor, or put a racial group at a disadvantage. [Source: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/structural-racism-definition/>]

**Intersectionality** shall mean the complex and cumulative ways that the effects of different forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, classism) combine, overlap, and intersect—especially in the experiences of marginalized people or group. [Source: PDE Equitable Practices Hub  
(<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/equityandinclusion/EPH/SelfAwareness/In>

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[dividual/Pages/default.aspx](#); Intersectionality into Practices  
(<https://www.opportunityagenda.org/explore/resources-publications/ten-tips-putting-intersectionality-practice>) - modified]

**Microaggression** means verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and/or insults toward any group or member of a group, particularly culturally marginalized groups. [Source: Derald Wing Sue, PhD, “Microaggressions: More than Just Race” (Psychology Today, 17 November 2010)].

**Opportunity gaps** shall mean the disparities in the delivery of educational and extracurricular opportunities, resources, and funding between and among different student groups, leading to different academic, extracurricular, social, and economic outcomes for students. [Source: PSBA Equity Toolkit]

**Prejudice** means a pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or groups toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics. [Source: Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative, A Community Builder's Tool Kit, Appendix I (2000)].

**Privilege** means unearned social power accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to all members of a dominant group (for example, white privilege, male privilege, etc.). Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we're taught not to see it, but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage over those who do not have it. [Source: Colours of Resistance Archive, “Privilege” (accessed 28 June 2013)]

**Race** is a socially constructed category the meaning of which varies over time, space and across cultures (<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race>). It is based on the unscientific belief that humans can be grouped into “races” based on biological differences (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/race-is-a-social-construct-scientists-argue/>). Race describes categories assigned to demographic groups based mostly on observable physical characteristics, like skin color, hair texture and eye shape; refers to physical differences that groups and cultures consider socially significant. [Source: American Sociological Association]. While the meaning of race is socially constructed, the effects of racism are real.

**Racism** is a system of oppression/advantage based on race. Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices. [Source:

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“What Is Racism?” – Dismantling Racism Works (dRworks) web workbook]. See also **Structural Racism and Institutional Racism**.

**Structural Racism** means a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist. [Source: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/structural-racism-definition/>]

See also **Policy/AR 259 (Transgender & Gender Diverse Students – Ensuring Equity and Nondiscrimination)** for additional definitions including, but not limited to, gender expression, gender identity, sex assigned at birth, and sexual orientation.

**Delegation of Responsibility**

The Superintendent and/or designee(s) shall use disaggregated District, building-level, and individual student data to systematically assess which students and/or student groups are experiencing the least success, determine why, and target resources and efforts to address identified needs and improve overall educational outcomes.

The Superintendent and/or designee(s) shall identify and remove barriers that prevent students from equitably accessing educational opportunities.

Each District employee shall be responsible for fostering a school environment that promotes equity and for conducting themselves in a culturally competent manner, consistent with the practices communicated at required in-service and professional development seminars sponsored by the District.

The Superintendent or designee shall develop and disseminate Administrative Regulations implementing this Policy, consistent with the general guidelines outlined below and in accordance with applicable law, to promote equity in all District schools, programs, and services. The Administrative Regulations shall, at a minimum, address the following topics:

1. The maintenance of high academic standards and expectations for every student, and the provision of multiple pathways to success in order to support the achievement of every student based on their individual needs.
2. Ensuring equitable access to academic programs, rigorous coursework options, and athletic, extracurricular, and co-curricular offerings to every student, especially the most historically underperforming and challenged learners such as students of color, students with

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disabilities, students with limited English language proficiency, and economically disadvantaged students.

3. The provision of resources, materials, and assessments that reflect the diversity of the District's students and which are geared toward the understanding and appreciation of individual cultural uniqueness and differences.
4. The equitable administration of school-based discipline at all District schools based on a model of restorative practices rather than punitive measures, when appropriate.
5. The promotion and maintenance of welcoming and inclusive school environments.
6. Meaningfully engaging and empowering students, their families, and members of the Lower Merion and Narberth communities to be partners in the District's efforts to provide an equitable experience for every student. This shall include, among other methods, periodically soliciting feedback from: (1) a cross-section of District students regarding their experiences, sense of inclusion, and how their needs are being met; and (2) other members of the Lower Merion and Narberth communities.
7. Recruiting, employing, supporting, and retaining a workforce that is culturally responsive and reflective of the diversity of the Lower Merion and Narberth communities.
8. The provision of meaningful professional development for District employees, Board members, and, where possible, independent contractors, to strengthen their knowledge and skills in areas such as cultural proficiency, equity, inclusion, implicit and explicit bias awareness, and social justice. Such professional development sessions should offer opportunities for self-reflection and the receipt of feedback on how to improve upon carrying out the Board's equity statement and supporting the success of every student.
9. Ongoing review, evaluation, and modification of policies and practices that perpetuate inequitable outcomes for students based on an annual review of District qualitative and quantitative data.
10. Periodic reporting to the Board and community stakeholders on the success of the District's equity initiatives, progress towards achieving the goals of this Policy, and emerging needs.

### **Related Policies:**

Policy/AR 006 (Civility)

Policy/AR 103 (Equal Opportunity Program for School and Classroom Practices)

Policy/AR 104 (Equal Opportunity Program for Employment Practices)

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Policy/AR 114 (Individualized Student Supports and Services)

Policy/AR 119 (Controversial and Value Issues)

Policy/AR 130 (Guidelines Concerning Religion)

Policy/AR 151 (Student Athletics)

Policy/AR 152 (Participation in Curricular Programs and Activities by Economically Disadvantaged Students)

Policy/AR 246 (Discriminatory Harassment, Bullying & Hazing)

Policy/AR 346-446-546 (Discriminatory Harassment By and Of Employees and Other Members of the School Community)

Policy/AR 259 (Transgender and Gender Diverse Students: Ensuring Equity and Nondiscrimination)