

SCHENECTADY CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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PRESS RELEASE

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Schenectady Board of Education adopts district's first "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity in Education Policy"

SCHENECTADY - The Schenectady City School District Board of Education unanimously approved the district's first **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity in Education (DEI) Policy** (8140) at the meeting held on November 17. The new policy is aligned with the district's strategic plan, vision, and core values. It serves to advance work toward ensuring educational equity, inclusivity, and diverse opportunities for all students to reach their highest potential.

By adopting a DEI policy, the school board is committing to creating a positive learning environment by ensuring that barriers are removed, and all students have equal educational opportunities and the resources they need to succeed.

"I am pleased that the board of education passed the DEI policy," said Cathy Lewis, president of the Schenectady City School District Board of Education. "The staff, administration and board have been engaged in DEI work for many years. I am excited that we now have a formal policy that was approved this week."

"I am very pleased that we have a DEI policy that is aligned with our strategic plan and will serve to guide our work," said Anibal Soler, Jr., superintendent of schools. "Developing this plan took a lot of work by many people. I am grateful for their hard work and commitment. As a school community, we are stronger and will have better outcomes when we embrace our differences and celebrate inclusivity. This policy is our district's commitment to our community."

"I'm so thankful to the many staff members who spent hours working on Schenectady's DEI policy over the last 18 months," said Ann Reilly, board of education and policy committee member. "The Anti-Racism Task Force and the members of the subcommittee are to be commended for their efforts to ensure that all Schenectady students will have the benefit of an equitable, inclusive education that values and celebrates diversity and each individual."

“SCSD continues to lead the charge supporting all students by embracing and valuing our youth’s collective self,” said Bernice Rivera, vice president of the board of education. “Our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Policy demonstrates our dedication to honor our motto *Everyone counts, and Everyone learns*. Through a unified effort with various collaborators SCSD has encapsulated years of equity work into a policy that considers all our students’ historical, physical, emotional, and developmental strengths and barriers.” Rivera added that the policy reminds us to harness our students’ cultural assets while challenging and eliminating existing structures that might place a roadblock to their success. “I thank Superintendent Soler, the policy committee and team for providing a strong foundation to continue our equity work for our students, district, and community,” she said.

The work to develop a policy got underway more than two years ago. The district’s 15-member Anti-Racism Task Force, led by Dr. Patrick Jean-Pierre, principal of Paige Elementary School and former chair of the SCSD Board of Education Policy Sub-Committee, launched a process to develop a policy that is culturally responsive, asset-based, inclusive and supports high academic achievement and high expectations for all students and employees from every background.

“Thank you to the BOE policy sub-committee and the Anti-Racism Task Force for all their work on this policy,” said Jean-Pierre, who also expressed gratitude to the families, community members, staff and students who contributed to the process. “I am thankful for the new superintendent, his team and board for moving swiftly to approve the DEI policy,” said Jean-Pierre.

After many hours of hard work, the members of the Anti-Racism Task Force are pleased the policy has been adopted.

“It was amazing to work with a group that is so dedicated to ensuring our district is safe, secure, and inclusive for staff and students and where people from all backgrounds can thrive,” said Kerri Messler, principal of Keane Elementary School and member of the task force. “We engaged in dialogue, discussion, debate. We questioned semantics, nuances, and connotations. We revised and edited through multiple feedback cycles.” Messler said it was a tremendous amount of work “but so worth every second.” She added, “I feel honored to have been part of such an important policy.”

“I’m very excited that this solidifies that the work will continue,” said Oriana Miles, teacher at Schenectady High School and member of the Anti-Racism Task Force. “I have seen a difference in students’ comfortability since we have been doing the necessary work and unapologetically addressing the issues. We lead by example, and we have no idea the needed impact that this work brings into our school community.”

“I am excited to continue this work with a great team and believe the policy will provide the foundation for the work ahead with a lens on diversity, equity and inclusion,” said Dr. Carlos Cotto, assistant superintendent of innovation, equity, and engagement.

“I think the adoption of this policy is important to the life of the school district,” said Alfred Tompkins, senior project specialist-parent liaison, and member of the task force. He also emphasized, “best practice in family engagement fosters more equitable collaborations between families, communities and educational systems...” a quote from Ishimaru, author of [Just Schools](#).

“We have opportunity with this policy to speak into the lives of the community, the families and of course our students, for generations,” said Tompkins. “This is an important step, but we have to keep going. The future of our young people, their families and the community will let us know how we are doing.”

Tompkins added, “thank you to the BOE, for your support and encouragement along the way.”

The policy states that differences will be valued, celebrated, and welcomed in Schenectady schools and that all students will have access to quality education, qualified teachers, challenging curriculum, full opportunity, and individually tailored support for learning.

The policy also outlines how curriculum and instruction will reflect the district’s commitment to equity and those materials will reflect diversity and include a range of perspectives and experiences, particularly those of historically underserved, underrepresented groups. Activities and programs will be designed to provide opportunities for cross-curricular, cross-cultural interaction that foster respect for differences.

The New York State School Board Association and New York State Council of School Superintendents recently issued a [joint statement on diversity equity and inclusion initiatives](#) (November 10, 2021), noting that there are debates over the intent and focus of DEI efforts. As the letter states, school districts “adopt a curriculum that teaches students to think analytically, understand multiple perspectives and draw their own conclusions. An equitable and inclusive education prepares all students for a lifetime of thoughtful discussion and analysis of issues that shape and define our society, today and into the future.”

Moving forward, the superintendent will establish a task force with stakeholder representation, to continue to the work of DEI supportive initiatives. “This is an ongoing process,” said Soler. “The work will continue to evolve as we adopt measures and goals.” The board of education and superintendent will monitor and review the metrics and equity activities. Soler said the work and reporting will be transparent and regular progress on the DEI plan and outcomes will be shared.

New Policy and Joint Letter

[The SCSD Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity in Education Policy](#) (November 17, 2021)

[New York State School Board Association Letter](#) (November 10, 2021)

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