



## Racial Equity Teams Case Studies Summary

Seattle Public Schools' (SPS) Racial Equity Policy 0030, SPS and the Seattle Education Association (SEA) developed a joint initiative in 2015 to develop and support Racial Equity Teams in cohorts of schools across the district. This partnership between a school district, union, and university aims to support broader racial equity efforts in the district and use analyses of program implementation to inform efforts to foster educational justice.

We partnered with racial equity teams to co-design equitable instructional and leadership practices in and between schools. To build a solid foundation for that effort, we sought to develop a more complete understanding of how racial equity teams were working to address racial inequities in discipline and learning and the organizational conditions that foster or constrain those efforts.

### OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDY DESIGN

**Research Questions.** Our team of faculty and students collected qualitative data in four selected schools to address the following research questions:

- *How do schools with RETs work to build educators' practice to address racial inequities in classrooms and schools?*
- *What RET characteristics, supports, and organizational conditions hinder or foster team efforts to shift policy and practice to foster greater racial equity?*

**Case Study Site Rationale.** We conducted analyses of 4 schools to examine variability across levels (2 elem, 1 middle, 1 high school); geography (1 north, 1 central, 1 west, 1 southeast); overall achievement as well as academic and discipline racial disparities; and focus of RET work. We drew on racial disproportionalities data between 2014-2016, school data, RET survey data, and SPS/SEA recommendations to select from Cohort 1 & 2 schools to identify more mature teams and work where we might be more likely to identify promising practices and impacts. They all appear to be on a trajectory around taking specific actions.

Leschi Elementary

Denny Middle School

Olympic Hills Elementary

Rainier Beach High School

**Findings.** Our in-depth cross case findings highlighted key themes in the work and potential impacts on the overall school: (1) RETs were fostering foundational racial literacies and explicit

conversations about race and equity, a major shift from the dominant race-evasive culture of schools; (2) teams identified the need for guidance and expertise in translating theory and racial literacies into instructional and schooling practices; (3) teams perceived principal support, access to all-staff professional development time, and sponsorship as critical to their ability to engage the broader school community in racial equity work; and (4) teams highlighted several key barriers to their ability to make change, from resistance from other educators in their buildings to insufficient in-house expertise and autonomy to address institutional and systemic sources of inequities.

***Implications.*** Despite the barriers to implementation, our case study and RET survey findings illuminated seven characteristics or conditions in which RETs perceived effectiveness in achieving their stated aims to address inequities in their schools. Such teams:

- Engaged in explicit race and equity talk within *and beyond* their teams;
- Cultivated trust as part of a community of practice to engage in racial equity work;
- Accessed expertise to leverage racial literacies towards developing innovative equity-focused practices;
- Had principals who sponsored their work and provided regular access to the full staff and resources;
- Shared leadership with school-based and community-based members/entities;
- Addressed both individual-level educator practice *and* organizational policies and practices implicated in inequities;
- Recognized the need to differentiate supports to account for the broad range of knowledge, skills and expertise in their school-community.