

# Denny International Middle School Racial Equity Team Analysis

This memo is based on 2 RET meeting observations, 7 interviews conducted between December 2017 – February 2018, and RET and school documents.

## Denny International Middle School Context

<b>RET Cohort Phase and Year</b>	❖ Phase 2, School Year 2015-2016
<b>Total enrollment</b>	❖ 850 (6-8)
<b>Demographics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Hispanic/Latino: 244 (29.6%)</li> <li>❖ American Indian: 20 (2.4%)</li> <li>❖ Asian: 132 (16%)</li> <li>❖ Black/African American: 202 (24.5%)</li> <li>❖ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 12 (1.5%)</li> <li>❖ White: 172 (20.9%)</li> <li>❖ Two or more Races: 41 (5%)</li> </ul>
<b>Principal</b>	❖ Jeff Clark
<b>Special Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Dual Language Immersion (Spanish)</li> <li>❖ My Brother and Sister's Keeper</li> <li>❖ Proyecto Saber</li> <li>❖ Home Visits</li> <li>❖ Aggression Therapy Replacement Class</li> <li>❖ Restorative Justice</li> <li>❖ Dolphin Time</li> <li>❖ Student RET team</li> <li>❖ Kingmakers Program</li> <li>❖ Šəqačib</li> <li>❖ Project Lead the Way (CTE Pathway)</li> <li>❖ Music/ Art</li> <li>❖ Hermanos Unidos</li> <li>❖ GSA</li> <li>❖ Extensive after-school and extended year programs</li> </ul>

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## Context of Racial Equity Work



According to many staff, Denny International Middle School is a “genuinely racially diverse” school in West Seattle, named a “positive outlier” by the superintendent for many years in “eliminating opportunity gaps for historically underserved students” (Superintendent’s Friday Update, 5/19/17) in both academics and discipline. The district is actively seeking to learn from the school (same Memo), and it has also received considerable press over the years for its work. As an international school, Denny has a Spanish dual-language programs and a global focus; its leaders credit its focus on standards-based instruction, grading, and formative assessment as main levers in its success. Denny’s current principal, has been at the school for 13 years, and has won numerous awards for his leadership, including the Foster Award for Excellence in 2011. In addition to a focus on academic standards, the principal credits having a positive belief in every student as another foundation of achieving “Academic Excellence—For Every Scholar--in Our Global Village” (School Mission Statement).

Denny International Middle School is a Cohort 2 RET school but by many accounts has been doing racial equity work prior to the RET’s inception in 2015 (10+ years). In Denny’s application to get funding for an RET, the focus was on “continuing to build upon” a lengthy list of existing programs, less on starting new work. For example, the application described how home visits have continued at Denny after the “Flight School” program ended, a program that began during Jeff Clark’s first year as principal in partnership with Dr. Martha Baretta. As mentioned earlier, Denny has dual-language immersion in Spanish and a 6-12<sup>th</sup> Mandarin pathway program with Chief Sealth, which supports high percentages of Latinx students in particular to learn in both Spanish (for some of whom this is their native language) and English. After school and summer programming also focus on equity either through identity development, community building or learning about structural inequities, some specifically designed to support particular communities (such as My Brother’s Keeper and Proyecto Saber). Denny also has programs specifically relating to more equitable discipline, including an Aggression Replacement Therapy Class (noted in the RET application) and beginning steps in restorative justice (noted in multiple teacher interviews). An RET member described how scheduling decisions enable this work around relentlessly supporting instruction, such as weekly “Dolphin Time” advisory and a “Teacher Choice Time” 6-minute buffer window in conjunction with lunch time that allows teachers to check in with students about academics. Denny’s RET application described their faculty as diverse, “collaborative” and “innovative,” which were positioned as indicators of readiness for deeper equity work.

# Denny International Middle School

## Racial Equity Team Analysis

### RET Members and Meetings

<b>Meeting Dates/Times</b>	❖ First and Third Mondays from 3:00 - 4:30 (Some are whole RET team and some are broken into sub-committees)
<b>Total Number Members</b>	❖ 12 (open committee with others coming occasionally)
<b>Member and Roles (incl. team lead(s))</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Jeff Clark (Principal, Facilitator)</li> <li>❖ Dr. Marcus Pimpleton (Assistant Principal)</li> <li>❖ Anastasia Sanchez (7th grade Science Teacher, Lead RET)</li> <li>❖ Jeff Smith (ELL Literacy Teacher)</li> <li>❖ Liz Olson (8th grade dual language humanities Spanish Teacher)</li> <li>❖ Tracy Gill (6th grade Social Studies and Reading Teacher)</li> <li>❖ Jordyn Frost (7th grade Science Teacher, Notetaker)</li> <li>❖ Sarah Lockenvitz (7th grade Social Studies Teacher)</li> <li>❖ Jeff Treistman (Librarian)</li> <li>❖ Eliza Yzaguirre (ELL Literacy Teacher)</li> </ul>
<b>Primary RET Activities</b>	<p>Whole team focuses on many conversations including staff PD, beginning steps in restorative justice, affinity groups and updates from the subcommittees or other equity related initiatives . Other RET meeting time is spent in two subcommittees: supporting immigrant families and student voice (students leading PD for whole staff).</p>
<b>Professional Development Providers</b>  	<p>RET team has consulted with Fran Patridge, Anita Morales, Dr. Wayne Au and Dr. Jones but all staff PD coming from the RET has been facilitated by RET members.</p>

# Denny International Middle School Racial Equity Team Analysis

## RET Members and Meetings

Denny's RET was formalized in 2015. About half the members are people of color (primarily Latinx) and about half are White. At this time, no parents, students or community members sit on the RET. Historically, the principal has facilitated the meetings and attended all of the RET institutes in the first year. Teachers take the lead on some initiatives (for example the two sub-committees on supporting immigrant families and student voice and creating rubrics for content and pedagogy for designing Professional Development) as the team matures but the principal is always present and facilitates the meetings. The team seems to reflect a mix of persistent teachers, principal leadership, and a culture of willingness to take risks for the sake of equity. One RET member described the team as a tight-knit group, incredibly dedicated to racial equity. Within this shared commitment, some members highlight differences in experience and approaches, from those full of urgency who want to focus on, discuss, and disrupt everything all at once, to others who are more measured and find promise in "baby steps." To them, this ends up striking a good balance of taking action and doing so strategically. Several of the RET members also serve as BLT members so there a consistent sharing of ideas in regards to BLT decision making, including determining the PD for the year.

The team also has consistent structures and protocols in place. For example, the principal is the facilitator and starts each meeting with review of Habits of Heart and Mind norms. The agenda is generated together through a shared google drive. The team has a consistent note-taker, who directly uploads notes to the team's google drive along with information and folders on meeting notes, agenda ideas, professional development materials, reading materials and materials used with the Student RET.

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### RET Goals and Activities

In the first two years of the RET, the group focused on PD (geared towards all staff) about whiteness, microaggressions, colorblindness, implicit bias, and other foundational concepts for doing racial equity work using tools provided by the district and material created on their own. In the second year, the members of the RET led staff affinity groups, in which staff broke up along racial lines to discuss and unpack the above ideas (white male, white female, Black, Latinx, Asian, and Multiracial groups formed). Previously, the RET was in charge of school-wide PD about once per month when they were focused on smaller things but now has shifted into bigger topics that require more planning for PDs. The next PD planned by a sub-committee of the RET in June is on combining language acquisition, brain research and cultural competency. The sub-committee on student voice will be working to create another professional development involving the Scholar Leadership Group which consists of students.

While the affinity groups have not been able to meet this year, another RET member, shared that they saw affinity groups as one of the most promising practices and essential to address racial inequity but felt that Denny has not yet gotten it right and expressed the need for experienced facilitators in leading affinity groups. Another RET member, described that there was some initial resistance from White staff members but that on the whole Denny's staff is "ready" to keep doing this work. Multiple RET members hope to see the affinity groups restarted this year and next steps for affinity groups has been an agenda item for the RET this year.

At the beginning of this school year, the RET compiled a list of potential foci for the RET this year including 16 possibilities. Each RET member ranked them, and the top two were "support immigrant families" and "student voice". The RET has broken into two sub-committees focused on each of these initiatives. Some of the other initiatives (i.e. Ethnic Studies, affinity groups) have been mentioned during full group RET meetings or other meetings but it is unclear if the RET will focus on them at a later time or work to align their efforts with other initiatives in the school. For example three members from the RET are also supporting district work in implementing Ethnic Studies curriculum at both Denny (which is a pilot school for this work) and other schools, and two members are supporting other school's RETs as SEA Race and Equity partners. Other RET members also mentioned another topic of focus in the larger RET group meetings is Restorative Justice, however the team and school is still in its initial stages in talking about what this would look like at Denny. Another sub-committee has formed since the start of the year focused on combining the work of language acquisition, brain research and cultural competency.

The work around student voice and student RET is detailed below as emerging promising practices. The subcommittee on supporting immigrant families has had one community/family event in the Fall. However, due to low attendance, the committee partnered with outside organizations on promoting an event in February focused on immigrant rights. This subcommittee is continuing to reflect on how to increase attendance to events focused on supporting immigrant families

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## RET and District Supports

The principal and the RET attended all district institutes during their first year as a team, but this year only two members have attended the district institutes, in part because of their roles as SEA Racial Equity Team Partners. In sharing an update about the recent Saturday Institutes, an RET member described some of the institutes as a review from prior years, explaining that the EOG toolkit felt “too foundational for Denny,” because the school as a whole is “past needing the information” covered in the EOG modules. The team came to a consensus to instead focus on trainings developed by the team. The principal thanked the two members who have been attending the institutes and encouraged others to attend but assured them that there was no pressure to do so.

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## Promising Equitable Practice

The subcommittee on student voice primarily aims to promote culturally responsive teaching by centralizing focus on the experiences of youth in the community. To date this year, the RET has put together two PD sessions for the school that have focused on hearing student voice and perspectives. The first one was at the end of the summer, where the RET brought together a student panel of Denny graduates to share their stories about being at DIMS as students of color. The second PD session was in December where the committee worked with current students to share their stories in small group listening sessions for the whole staff. About 20 students participated, and they identified a staff member they trusted who sat in the tables with them, along with 5-6 other adults. The students shared about things that helped them establish better relationships with teachers and other staff in the building. Next steps for this committee is called the Scholar Mentor Observation Project, where students will observe teachers with the principal in order to give feedback to teachers.

A teacher and founding RET member has started a Student RET with funding from Seattle Parks and Recreation. It operates separately from the school adult RET, primarily for logistical reasons, as students lack transportation home if they stay after school on Mondays for the adult RET meeting. The Student RET has designed learning sessions for their fellow students, including programming around Black and Latinx racial equity. For example, they created an advisory lesson during Dolphin Time for the entire school on colorblindness. Much of the Student RET focuses on their own learning of structural racism and inequities. The key difference between the Student RET and the sub-committee on student voice is the target audience for learning. Whereas the Student RET is focused primarily on their own learning and that of fellow students, the sub-committee on student voice is focused on all-staff learning from selected students on the student voice team.

The team has also created rubrics on content and pedagogy for high quality PD and an instructional toolkit. The instruction toolkit is a collection of common instructional practices they are trying to embed at Denny. At first this started with beginning things like all having learning objectives. Now, it includes video clips with Denny teachers and students to highlight practices in the toolkit to help meet a challenge in differentiating for staff, especially new staff and catching them up on prior PD (ex. trauma informed practices).