

Rainier Beach High School Racial Equity Team Memo

This memo is based on data collected from 3 observations, 3 interviews, and RET & school documents.

Rainier Beach High School Context

RET Cohort Phase and Year	❖ Phase 2, School Year 2015-2016
Total enrollment	❖ 696 (9-12)
Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Hispanic/Latino: 94 (13.5%) ❖ American Indian: 2 (Less than 1%) ❖ Asian: 190 (9.9%) ❖ Black/African American: 347 (49.9%) ❖ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 11 (1.6%) ❖ White: 21 (3%) ❖ Two or more Races: 31 (4.5%)
Principal	❖ Keith Smith
Special Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ International Baccalaureate (IB) Program ❖ Skill Center and City Campus: Advanced Career and technology collaboration\Service Learning Program ❖ King County Teen Health Center ❖ Washington Building Leaders of Change (WA-BLOC): Tutoring on Homework and SAT ❖ UW Dream Project

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Context of Racial Equity Work

Beginning around 2008, the former principal, key teachers and district administrators, and the school's Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) - a group of mostly African American parents and alumni - organized parents, community members and students to help gather support and attention to fund and implement the International Baccalaureate (IB) program at the school. The parents wanted access to the program to fully reflect the current demographics of the student body - not racially segregate students as has happened elsewhere - to ensure all students would have access to a high quality curriculum and instruction.

Drawing on major federal funding, the school increased teacher collaboration time, hired new staff, provided extensive professional development in the IB model, held "Community Cafes" to engage families and communities in learning about the model, and added an additional academic period to the day. Graduation rates have increased to a level above the district average, and the school was recently awarded the 2017 School of Distinction by the Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE) for its third year in a row, as well as the Golden School of Opportunity in 2016 (a national award). It has also been the focus of extensive media coverage about the school's improvement efforts. Although sustained funding for the IB program continues to be an issue of concern at the school, the school expanded to school-wide enrollment in IB social studies (in addition to Language Arts) this year.

Community-based organizations also play a major role in supporting students and developing their leadership in the community. WA-BLOC - Washington Building Leaders of Change - provides academic-year mentoring and supports, social justice programming (like the annual BLOC Party this month - a day of interactive workshops about community issues), and a corps of "Servant Leader Educators" to work with teachers and students in classrooms. During the summer, they run a 6-week Freedom School (based on the model from the Children's Defense Fund) that includes culturally-based academic enrichment as well as place-based social justice leadership development. In 2015, RBHS students in the Freedom Schools marched and successfully advocated at the City of Seattle for free year-round public transportation passes for all high school students. More recently, RBHS students successfully advocated at the district for building renovations. WA-BLOC is one of a number of academic support, social service, college readiness and youth-serving organizations housed in the school's "Success City" room.

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RET Members and Meetings

Meeting Dates/Times	❖ Second Tuesday of the month at 3:50 pm in room 262 (or as needed)
Total Number Members	❖ 5
Member and Roles (incl. team lead(s))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Rebecka McKinney - Lead RET, English Teacher ❖ Sarah Moges - School Librarian ❖ Folasade Brown - Teacher ❖ Chelsea Gallegos - Social worker ❖ Mark Epstein - History/ELL teacher
Primary RET Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Restorative Justice. Circle Keeper Training ❖ Youth Circle Keeper Trainings ❖ SWIS Suite Data Collection and Tracking Software ❖ Youth Undoing Racism Training
Professional Development Providers	❖ Afam Ayika, Restorative Justice Coordinator (grant funded for a year); Undoing Institutional Racism

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RET Members and Meetings

The formal Racial Equity Team (RET) includes the principal, assistant principal, three teachers, the school librarian, and the school social worker. Four people (three teachers and the school social worker) regularly attend meetings and move the RET work forward (for example, discussing priorities, applying for grants, and creating action items to accomplish their goals). Currently, the team does not include students or parents, though community-based organization staff are involved in much of the work of the RET related to restorative justice.

The team has one formal team leader, though they practice horizontal leadership and hold meetings in a circle style consistent with Restorative Justice (R.J.) principles. The role of the RET Lead consists of sending out meeting notes, scheduling times to meet, and creating the agendas. Other members take on responsibilities like grant writing, receiving data software training, or organizing trainings for youth and teachers.

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RET Goals and Activities

The RET has primarily focused on **addressing racial and gender disproportionalities in student discipline**. To obtain information on this topic, the RET team collected data on school-wide referrals and used the data to highlight racial bias in their school. Team members felt their analyses challenged the notion apparently held by some teachers at the school that implicit bias is not a problem because of the representation of "high minority" students and administrators.

Discipline Data Tracking

Last year, the RET generated in-school discipline reports by hand (with the support of a social work intern) and presented them to the staff. Specifically, their audit addressed the following questions: Which students are being sent out of class, why and how often, and what is their racial demographic makeup? This information was analyzed with an "equity lens" to discover which race / ethnicity received disciplinary references. Their 2016 Behavioral Referral Data (August 2016 - December 2016) showed that black females received 43% of the discipline referrals, implying that they are sent out of class at twice the rate they represent in the general student population. The presentation of these percentages and figures to the staff created a consensus to address these inequalities throughout the school.

Staff Professional Development

In particular, the Somali female population at the school had the highest rate of expulsions from class. Because of this, the RET team provided a staff training in Somali culture to reduce misunderstandings and referrals by teachers. The training included cross-cultural communication, an introduction to Somali culture and other cultural nuances.

This year, with the help of a grant, the School-Wide Information System (SWIS) will enable staff to enter discipline referrals online, as well as track how often a student is missing learning (due to behavioral or other reasons). Through the new SWIS data, the team hopes to answer these questions: (1) How often do referrals occur? (2) What problem behaviors occur most frequently in the building? (3) Where problem behaviors are most likely to occur? (4) When are problem behaviors most likely to occur? And (5) Which teachers and students are involved in most referrals? The RET team would also like to produce reports that track disproportionality by ethnicity, examine detailed information about individual students' referral patterns and create year-end reports to guide action planning for the upcoming school year. RET members are being trained to help review school-wide referral patterns and expect to train all teachers to input their referrals in this system.

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More broadly, the RET has identified teacher-student relationships as a core problem underlying disproportionate discipline. They have turned to restorative justice practices to build more healthy teacher-student relationships through discussions, surveys and trainings. They have started training teachers in Community Building Circles in accordance with their Restorative Justice Principles. Thus far 35% of the school staff has Circle Training and their goal is to get 80% of staff trained in circle keeping. The team hopes to continue the expansion of restorative justice professional development on a schoolwide level through external grant funds. They also aim to develop the voice of students to foster healthy relationships with teachers by conducting town halls and student-led professional development (see Promising Equitable Practices).

RET and District Supports

All participating team members raised concerns about what they perceive as limited support and participation from school and district administrators. Financial support appears to be a primary issue. The team has written grants and secured external funding to support all of their activities; they expressed frustration that the district receives 8% of these grants. No one on the team has received stipends for their work despite completing the necessary paperwork and follow up from members.

The team also feels their ability to make change at the school is constrained by minimal principal presence and involvement. The RET felt that greater involvement of the principal would allow the team to have "real power" to create changes in the school.

Finally, the team also feels there has been minimal guidance from the district. "If it seems like we are out of the loop, it's because we are. There is not a lot of guidance from the school district and we've accomplished a lot on our own," said one team member. Most members have stopped attending the Institute trainings because they perceived them to be repetitive without providing new information. The team expressed a desire for more guidance and district funds to help support their work. The district is considered an impediment to the team and instead will apply for grants through WA-BLOC. The team referenced roadblocks from the district's grant office in particular, for example not allowing the team to use its grant money to pay students to be "circle keepers."

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Promising Equitable Practice

Restorative Justice Circle Keeper Training

RBHS has been working to develop healthy relationships between students and teachers using Restorative Justice (R.J.) Principles. The RET team aims to reduce referrals by fostering these relationships and maintaining a school culture based on R.J. principles. Based on their data, RBHS has reduced its suspension rate by 40% from April 2016 to April 2017.

The team conducts “Race and Equity Student Town Hall Meetings” to provide feedback to staff from current students. The meetings consist of “circles” (congruent with R.J. principles) and surveys. Students answer questions about microaggressions, experiences with teachers, or whether they feel the curriculum reflects them.

The RET attributes this decrease in suspensions to the shift in school culture from a traditional punitive style of discipline to a restorative approach where the student is pulled closer in and relationships are repaired. Supported by their discipline data, fifteen RBHS staff members attended a training sponsored by the Rainier Beach Restorative Justice Project (led by Afam Ayika, the school’s former Restorative Justice Coordinator) in the summer of 2016. From this, teachers gained skills and knowledge to conduct restorative conversations and ‘Community Circles’ in their classrooms. In October 2017, the team trained an additional 16 teachers (funded by an RET grant).

Youth Circle Keepers & Student-led Professional Development

The RET has also trained Youth Circle Keepers. During the training, youth are provided with positive social-emotional development (Circle Keeper Training) to give them the skills to mediate conflicts amongst their peers when they arise and promote a more welcoming environment for all students. Following the training, teachers received an email with the list of students trained as Circle Keepers who can lead Circles in their classrooms at their request.

Youth leaders who graduated from RBHS recently led a school-wide professional development workshop for the school staff, “Youth Undoing Institutional Racism.” Although adults have led staff trainings about racism in the past, the team felt it was crucial for teachers to experience this training as led by students of colors. The alumni were paid by the RET and supported by the RET and Washington Building Leaders of Change (WA-BLOC) members at the school. The students provided teachers with information about the things they encourage in classrooms such as, not calling security if they have issues with a student. After the training staff wanted more student feedback, which led to another student council meeting.