

“Excellence with Equity” Award Application

School District Name: Bellingham Public Schools

Street Address or P.O. Box: 1306 Dupont Street

City: Bellingham State: WA Zip Code: 98225

Student Enrollment: ___ 1 – 1000 ___ 1001-9000 ___x___ 9001 and over

Application Submitted by: Camille Diaz Hackler

Title: School board president

Phone/Fax/email: 360-676-6501

School Board Director’s Names:

Camille Diaz Hackler

Doug Benjamin

Kelly Bashaw

Jenn Mason

Quenby Peterson

Question #1: How has your school district partnered with your local community to enhance equity access and accountability? (750 words or less)

Our district partners with our local community to enhance equity access and accountability in many ways; here are some examples:

- In August 2019, we, the school board, adopted a new race and equity policy, which acknowledges the district’s ongoing equity, diversity and inclusion work and keeps our district and superintendent accountable “to interrupt factors that perpetuate systemic inequities and practices that contribute to over- and under- representation of any student group compared to peers.” More on our new policy, executive limitation 10, in question #3.
- Through the formation of The Bellingham Promise, our district’s strategic plan, and subsequent commitments from staff, families and the community, we have made extraordinary progress on behalf of students in our district, all focused on equitable access. We believe equitable access is one of the key roots of our higher graduation rate and other key metrics.

- Project Free Education has been a targeted effort to reduce costs and increase access for students and families. Guided by The Promise's One Schoolhouse Approach, we realized we had gaps in providing an equitable distribution of resources and services, regardless of family income. We began by identifying areas where we expected families to pay out of pocket and began to shorten that list immediately. Since 2010 we have reduced direct costs to our families by nearly \$1 million either by removing direct costs or adding services and supplies.
- We eliminated the need for families to purchase school supplies at all schools. We now provide all school supplies. We eliminated course fees and pay-to-play athletic fees at middle and high schools. We have also reached an agreement with our local community college to provide College in the High School courses at the rate of \$100 for a five-credit course and further subsidize that cost for students who qualify for free and reduced meals.
- By partnering with our community, we have also been able to provide full-time kindergarten; early entrance kindergarten, called Promise K (based on need and access); and preschool programs at many of our schools. This focus on early learning prioritizes our youngest learners in order to pay dividends over time. This fall, OSPI wrote guidance, and now this transitional K program can be accessed across Washington.
- As for enrichment and electives, we now provide musical instruments through a partnership with the Bellingham Public Schools Foundation to ensure that no student is denied a music education due to an inability to pay. We are the first district in the state to bring back Traffic Safety Education to the regular school day at no charge to families. This is a \$400 savings per family, giving all students access to this important training.
- Our community has helped us increase equity and opportunity as well, through significant initiatives that they approved through levies and bonds. These funds have allowed us to invest in one-to-one technology (one laptop per student) for all secondary students in our district, as well as build a brand new alternative high school, Options High School, for students who need additional support and a non-traditional learning environment.
- We believe that increasing opportunities and reducing barriers is part of the reason our students are finding greater success than in years past. Some of these indicators include a reduction in out-of-school suspensions of approximately 60 percent over the past nine years, increased extended graduation rates from 79 percent in 2010 to 88 percent in 2017, which is the most recent data available. Our low-income and Latinx students' graduation rates saw even steeper gains over this time-period. These trends can be attributed to important investments and initiatives to improve graduation rates, including our districtwide family engagement team that connects with and supports Latinx families.
- Another example of a partnership is with the Whatcom Community Foundation (WCF), a local philanthropic organization that is a partner in our district's ongoing efforts to transform school food. We recently built and opened a new Central Kitchen funded by our 2013 bond, and WCF has provided a \$1 million grant, investing in research, planning, staff training and equipment upgrades. This investment in a new Central Kitchen is helping us serve more nourishing, delicious, whole foods in the meals and snacks we provide to more than 12,000 students. WCF is helping us achieve The Good Food Promise for every student and re-invent school lunch.

Question #2: How has your school district celebrated equity with your students and families? (750 words or less)

Bellingham Public Schools celebrates equity with students and families in a number of ways, including engaging with students and families, particularly those who reflect the diversity of our community. Here are some noteworthy examples of the district's efforts:

- Creating opportunities to listen to minoritized student and family voices takes a variety of forms including face to face meetings with members of the executive team.
- Belonging surveys administered at Shuksan Middle School in partnership with Western Washington University.
- Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) students invited to participate/address the entire leadership team meeting.
- Support for LGBTQ clubs in secondary schools; Queer Prom 2018 and 2019.
- Club de Lectura in our schools; promoting high school student participation as tutors in our elementary schools.
- Yearly trip to Olympia to the Latinx Educational Achievement Project (LEAP) where identified students from various BPS high schools attend to learn about personal leadership, cultural competency and community advocacy. Students get opportunity to meet with local government representatives and learn about government policies. Superintendent meets with students to discuss learning moments and recommendations to support Latinx community.
- Superintendent's Student Advisory Committee includes two representatives from each of our four high schools who meet monthly with the superintendent to discuss issues and provide feedback.
- Hosting the Latinx Education Summit, which celebrates Latinx culture in our area and has over a thousand people in attendance.
- Our Student Equity and Inclusion coordinator identifies and provides direct service to historically underserved students (undocumented, unaccompanied, at-risk, newcomers, EL, etc.) with unique needs. This has led to listening sessions with superintendent, school administrators, and staff to better understand the strengths, needs, and student life experiences.

Another important way we celebrate equity is through storytelling. We write, photograph, film and share stories that shine a light on the incredible examples of The Promise in action, including this story about the [first annual Whatcom Youth Pride parade](#), [staff participating in summer study of indigenous ways of knowing](#), [our special engagement event with south Asian families](#) and a [video about our bilingual educator academy](#).



Question #3: What policy and procedures have you implemented or removed in order to advance educational equity within your school district? (750 words or less).

The new race and equity policy directs us to continue to “confront the institutional bias that results in predictability of student success or lack thereof, including but not limited to race and ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, language and culture.”

It instructs our superintendent to take a number of equity-centered actions, including recruit, employ, support, retain and continuously develop a workforce of culturally-responsive staff; increase workforce diversity reflective of our students; and provide an environment that supports the creation and implementation of culturally-responsive instructional practices and curriculum.

Our school board also modified The Bellingham Promise this summer, including one of the 17 outcomes: honest and ethical citizens who act with integrity. We heard concerns from our community that the word “citizens” could be misinterpreted, and that some may think we are excluding students and members of our community who are not U.S. citizens. In an effort to be more inclusive, we have changed the word “citizen” to “individual.”

We have spent considerable time with [Policy 3130](#) – Student Attendance Areas over the last 18 months. One of our significant initiatives over the past couple of years has involved changing our attendance area boundaries to respond to large pockets of growth and overcrowding in areas of our district. It has also given us the opportunity to engage our community in conversations around equity, redlining, entitlement, and the importance of balancing the demographics within our district. These can and have been hard conversations, but we have welcomed the opportunities and embraced the tension. This has included monthly meetings with our [Attendance Areas PreK-12 Standing Committee](#), which is comprised of nearly 40 staff, students and community members. It has also included numerous neighborhood meetings, some of which have been quite contentious, yet in each case, those meetings resulted in a better understanding of the purpose and opportunities that exist with these potential changes. Our board has supported

our leaders in meeting with hundreds of parents in large group, small group and one-on-one meetings to discuss concerns. A proposal, which includes significant changes to our attendance boundaries, has been developed and will be approved this fall. As a result of strong community engagement, we are primed for these changes to be successful and of great benefit to our families in the future.