

Thornton Fractional District 215
Dominique Newman, Public Relations Officer
708-585-2309
dnewman@tfd215.org

Thornton Fractional District 215 Adopts Equity Plan of Action as Part of Ongoing Equity Initiative

Lansing, IL- At their July 28, 2020 regular meeting, the Thornton Fractional District 215 Board of Education adopted an Equity Plan of Action as part of an ongoing equity initiative in the district. The plan “acknowledges the historic, persistent, and pervasive disparities between the educational performance of White students and Students of Color as unacceptable.” The District 215 Equity Plan of Action states, “Closing the performance gap through the development of an equitable learning environment where all students thrive is the top priority of the Board of Education, Superintendent, Administration, and all District 215 staff.” The plan also cites the district’s equity statement, which was adopted as District 215 policy by the Board of Education in May of 2019:

District 215 is committed to an overall culture of equity where the creation and implementation of policy, the allocation of resources, and access to opportunity are intentionally aligned to meet the needs of all student groups, regardless of: race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, home or first language, religion, national origin, immigration status, age, or physical appearance.

The following goals are set forth in the District 215 Equity Plan of Action, while also noting the actions that will be taken to achieve each goal and the metrics that will be used to assess the achievement of each goal:

Goal 1: All students will have access to high quality-rigorous, culturally relevant instruction, curriculum, and educational experiences.

Goal 2: All staff will engage in professional learning that examines racial and cultural identity and its impact on teaching, learning, and belief systems.

Goal 3: The District will increase community partnerships and family involvement in the educational environment.

Goal 4: The District shall ensure hiring practices effectively recruit diverse candidates and develop supports for staff retention.

Superintendent Dr. Sophia Jones-Redmond noted, “I am so pleased that the Equity Plan of Action was adopted by the Board of Education. I am impressed by the equity work the district has accomplished over the past 18 months, and I’m excited to be a part of moving the work forward.”

The District 215 Equity Plan of Action follows several other steps taken by Thornton Fractional District 215 Board over the past year or more regarding equity in District 215. In the spring of 2019, the Board of Education formed an equity committee of the board to formalize and move forward the equity work within the district. The equity committee subsequently formed an equity sub-committee in the fall of 2019 comprised of administrators, staff, parents, and students who meet to help advise the board's equity committee work and agenda. The establishment of an ad hoc committee that will specifically focus on the recruitment and retention of minority staff began in the spring of 2020. The ad hoc committee also includes administration, staff, students, parents, and board members. The ad hoc committee will begin meeting this fall following a delay due to COVID-19 and the transition to a new superintendent, Dr. Sophia Jones-Redmond.

Another equity-driven initiative undertaken in the past year by Thornton Fractional District 215 is a comprehensive curriculum rewrite that includes a focus on including more voices and representations of People of Color. At last night's Board of Education meeting, the Board voted to renew a contract with Curriculum Management Solutions Inc., a curriculum consultant that will help audit the content and implementation of District 215's curriculum rewrite, tailoring the audit to include the district's focus on cultural relevancy in the curriculum. In the past two years, the Board of Education has also supported an initiative to increase access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses, added multiple new AP courses, and allocated funding so that students can take AP exams for college credit at no cost. Additionally, a partnership with Equal Opportunity Schools that began in the fall of 2019 has helped District 215 identify students of color and low-income students who qualify for, but are missing from Advanced Placement courses.

This summer, the District 215 Board of Education has also issued a statement of solidarity in response to the racially motivated incidents occurring throughout the U.S. and supported an online event for African-American, male students of District 215 that provided a safe space for conversation on recent events. As well, the Board recently initiated a student survey of TF South students regarding the pursuit of a name change from the school team name/nickname of "Rebels."

In addition to adopting the District 215 Equity Plan of Action at their July meeting, The Board of Education also voted to form a Student Equity Leadership Club at each school and adopted a resolution on racial justice that mirrored that of the Illinois State Board of Education.

According to Michael Bolz, District 215 Board President, "I am proud to be a part of Board that has done meaningful work to help our district achieve an equitable educational environment for our students. Our administrators and staff have firmly supported and contributed to this work as well, and for that, I am truly grateful."

Documents and further information detailing the equity initiatives found above can be found on the District 215 website at <https://www.tfd215.org/aboutus/commitment-to-equity/>.

About Thornton Fractional High School District 215: District 215 serves the students of Burnham, Calumet City, Lansing, and Lynwood at Thornton Fractional North High School, Thornton Fractional South High School, Thornton Fractional Center for Academics and Technology, and Thornton Fractional Center for Alternative Learning. The mission of District 215 is to provide diverse learning opportunities that inspire all students to become life-long learners who contribute to their community.

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