



***Equity Task Force  
Equity Impact Action Plan  
December 2021***

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# Equity Task Force Overview

A cornerstone of the District’s Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) is ensuring that all students achieve high levels of success and feel safe at school. In response to growing concerns about the equity divide in VUSD, the District enacted an Equity Task Force to uncover areas of discrepancy, identify root causes, and bring recommendations to the VUSD Governing Board for review. While the Equity Task Force is committed to addressing all areas of equity that impact students and the school community, the initial focus would be on racial equity. The need for this necessary work was highlighted by both a local and national discourse on the need for racial equity reform. The Equity Task Force will continue to monitor adopted recommendations and engage with critical stakeholders throughout this process.

The plan enclosed was developed by the members of the Equity Task Force with the support of experienced consultants through a process of learning, collaboration, and planning to address three racial equity gaps/challenges that are evident in district data. The equity impact action plan includes the input of several community and student listening sessions, review of relevant data, collaboration with staff, exploration of history and current status, considerations of barriers and high level action steps that are recommended to the Board. While extensive work has been done to understand and plan to address these equity gaps, there is an enormous amount of work to continue as the District strives for systemic change to eliminate equity gaps to realize its core values.

# Equity Task Force Members

An early identified critical component of the Equity Task force was that its members reflected diverse perspectives and roles in supporting the education of VUSD’s students.

**Community Members:**

Current Members:

- Alan Cole
- Ana Vargas
- Angela Higdon
- Nick Brady
- Shanan Danley
- Shaunte Hill

Contributing Partners:

- Beatriz Cadenas
- Charleston Brown
- Karla Valdez
- Dr. Morris Curry
- Tania Gilliam
- Tina Clay

**Classified and Certificated Staff:**

Current Members:

Laura Roberts                      Steven Power  
Maya Wildgoose                      Tricia Cowen

Contributing Partner:

Mizuki McCall

**Administrators:**

Site Administrators:

Adam Wight  
Cathy Bozzini  
Jessica Reed  
Tiffany Donahue

District Administrators:

Aumrey Moland  
Ramiro Barron  
Sasha Begell

We want to thank and acknowledge all community and student listening session participants as well as the many staff and faculty that joined or offered expertise for their time and dedication to speaking their truth to assist in the equity development process.

# Mission Statement

The Equity Task Force of VUSD is committed to building awareness, creating solutions, and addressing inequities by advocating equity and justice for historically marginalized groups. We aim to empower all students and staff through collaboration, research, and educational development for the intentional disruption of systemic racism, bigotry, and prejudice. Our goal is to create an education system that is culturally responsive and culturally sustaining. We are equally committed to building the leaders of tomorrow who will combat racism and prejudice to promote equity throughout their lives.

# Executive Summary

Addressing issues of equity has become a focus of the Vacaville Unified School District. The District has grappled with many areas of educational equity over time. From the vast differences in demographics between schools, the prioritization of district funding, documented racially based incidents and evident achievement gaps the school board and community are aware that equity needs to be addressed.

By creating collaborative learning opportunities amongst leadership, the abilities to support the work and strategically approach an understanding of the challenges is being developed. Through the involvement of members of our community in shared learning experiences to create an understanding of equity, safe spaces for brave action are being created throughout the district. Discussions including both the barriers to and strategies for achieving equity while delving into specific areas of inequity are being held. The resulting high level equity impact action plan demonstrates the complexities involved in examining and addressing inequities as a mechanism to create equitable systems that produce opportunities for success.

The Vacaville Unified School District took action to build a culture of equity, belonging, inclusion and anti-racism by partnering with Nicole Anderson and Associates, LLC to collaborate with the school board and district leadership to explore the issues in depth and determine goals and next steps to move forward. The consultants facilitated activities for the Equity Task Force on Racial Equity to engage in learning, discussion, as well as the action planning. The Equity Task Force facilitated several community and student forums to collect qualitative data around the experiences and perspectives of various stakeholders. The Consultant team introduced the Water of Systems Change Framework and its accompanying action planning process as a mechanism to understand inequities in place and to help develop a plan to address systemic inequities over time.

The purpose of an equity impact action plan is to establish a clear vision and systemic approach to addressing identified racial equity gaps. This plan is designed to include components that will guide the process for identifying racial equity gaps that can be addressed over time. These components are based on research around SMART goals, root cause analysis, as well as research from the [Water of Systems Change article](#) and [action planning exercise](#) to support an internal and external systems approach to addressing a challenge such as institutional racism.

The Equity Task Force team experienced a process that enabled them to not only bond through sharing their own identities, but to recognize the differences and unique perspectives that those identities bring. Overcoming the discomfort associated with discussing and addressing inequities as they delved into root causes, explored missing

perspectives and drafted initial action plans was part of the growth and development process.

Community and student listening sessions were held to gather information from and hear the voices of the community and begin the process of learning and understanding this history and manifestation of oppression not just in the United States as a whole, but specifically in Vacaville.

Whereas, the ETF acknowledges that equity work is never done, this final report provides clear recommendations for the school board and District leadership to move the District and community forward in their efforts to build a more equitable and conscious Vacaville Unified School District.

## Addressing Institutional Racism

As school district stakeholders come together to address the complex issue of institutional racism, it is critical to recognize that while we are not responsible for the racial injustices of the past. Rather, we must come together in recognition of the following:

- Racism has harmed all people in some form or fashion
- The pain and impact of racism affect people differently

It is imperative that we not engage in the concept of “oppression olympics” nor “blaming and shaming”. Instead, it is critical that we build empathy, acknowledge the needs of each individual based on their cultural identity/journey and establish inclusive, brave environments in order to promote healing.

The Vacaville Unified School District has embarked upon a deeper level of authentic collaboration with community members, parents, student advocacy groups, as well as other local agencies to become more united in its vision and shared beliefs around racial equity. As district stakeholders take a deeper dive into the discomfort of addressing institutional racism and eliminating all forms of identity oppression, it is imperative that safe space be fostered through continuous healing, listening, and learning in order to build trust of the community as a whole.

The journey to combating institutional racism must begin with dismantling internal and external barriers that may impede the work. Barriers to closing racial equity gaps must be unpacked as well and include many factors such as historical policies and legislation, resistance to change, privilege, entitlement, implicit bias, stereotypes, and most detrimentally, the lack of awareness of the need to change. District leadership must

build capacity to proactively address these barriers as they establish structures to support students. The journey to addressing institutional racism requires a systemic approach through shifting the conditions that are holding the problem in place. These conditions include not only policy, practice, and resource allocation, but also relationships, power dynamics, and mental models.

This work first requires an “inside-out” approach through the focus on less explicit but more powerful implicit conditions for change, while also turning the lens on leadership itself. To fully embrace systems change, the school board alongside district leadership must be prepared to see how its own ways of thinking and acting must change as well.

-The Water of Systems Change by John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge

In order to interrupt systemic racial inequities that impact the community, it is important to understand the context of these barriers.

Institutional racism refers to the policies and practices within and across institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favor, or put a racial group at a disadvantage. Examples of institutional racism can be found in a variety of spaces in the education system and presents itself uniquely in every school and school district. One common example is through the school disciplinary policies in which students of color are punished or referred to special education at much higher rates than their white peers. Another example is in the hiring process where recruitment and retention practices yield disproportionate ethnic representation of staff in comparison to the student population or community.

Structural or Systemic racism refers to a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” or proximity to “blackness” to endure, adapt and magnify over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist in our nation. (The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change)

In order to effectively engage in the work of interrupting institutional racism, it is critical that safe space be established amongst all who are impacted by the work. The following four community agreements provide a guide for stakeholders to commit and focus on taking a deeper dive into the sensitive and uncomfortable work of addressing racism.

These agreements, adapted from the work of Glenn E. Singleton & Curtis Linton, *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools.*, were adopted by the VUSD Equity Task force and include the following:

- o Stay engaged: Staying engaged means “remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue”
- o Experience discomfort: This norm acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable, especially, in dialogue about race, and that participants make a commitment to bring issues into the open. It is not talking about these issues that create divisiveness. The divisiveness that has existed for centuries in society and has been foundational in our schools has never been interracially addressed. It is only through dialogue, even when uncomfortable, that healing and change begin.
- o Speak your truth: This means being open about thoughts and feelings and not just saying what you think others want to hear.
- o Expect and accept nonclosure: This agreement asks participants to “hang out in uncertainty” and not rush to quick solutions, especially in relation to racial understanding, which requires ongoing dialogue

## Recommendations to the Governing Board

As outlined in the literature reviewed of *The Water of Systems Change*, (Kania, Kramer, & Senge, 2018), recommendations to the board include both **explicit action items** (such as policy and practice changes) and **implicit culture shifts** (such as mental model and bias affirmation). Recommendations outlined allow the District to proceed in developing equitable practices in response to identified equity gaps. These recommendations are designed to provide guidance for the Governing Board and District Staff to consider when addressing policy, practice and decision making in the areas of Curriculum, Personnel and Discipline.



# Subcommittee Recommendations

## Curriculum

**Equity Statement:** Ensuring equitable access to education and all students have high levels of academic success by honoring and valuing all members of our community by providing intentionally designed curricula that incorporate perspectives and experiences that are reflective of our students' diverse identities.

**Goal 1:** All classrooms in VUSD will provide curricula that reflects diverse perspectives and cultures, promotes diverse perspectives, provides a safe learning environment and ensures success for all.

### Short Term Action Steps

- Individual school sites engage in reflection of values and generate/incorporate an equity statement that is reflective of these values and student/community need
- Ensure that school libraries (physical, digital and virtual) provide materials that reflect diverse cultures and perspectives
- Provide clarification to staff on the use of supplementary materials consistent with board policy
- Provide an Ethnic Studies course to adhere to California AB101 high school graduation requirement.

### Long Term Action Steps

- Ensure that all learning environments provide opportunities for students to learn perspectives of others by normalizing equitable pedagogy as an established practice in VUSD
- Ensure that Teachers and students are supported in the promotion of equitable practices, symbols, and curriculum that comply with board policy related to equity.
- Provide culturally relevant lessons to elementary and middle school students by expanding Ethnic Studies curriculum.
- Include a Culturally Responsive Teaching rubric to all proposed new curriculum. Curriculum that does not meet requirements for Culturally Relevant Teaching should be considered only with a supplement.

**Goal 2:** All teachers will be proficient in delivering curriculum that incorporates culturally responsive pedagogy and administration will be able to support teachers in honing their craft and effectively monitor established site equity frameworks.

<p><b>Short Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide Professional Development opportunities for <u>all teachers</u> and expand the focus of academic collaboration to include equitable practice and culturally relevant teaching.</li> <li>● Integration of <u>new teacher</u> professional development to include cultural responsiveness and lesson development. Identify venues to provide teacher training (e.g., BTSA, Teacher collaboration sessions, site/district PD).</li> <li>● Provide training to VUSD administration on how to evaluate classroom instruction/learning environments for cultural relevancy and inclusion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Long Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Incorporate equity topics into all future VUSD professional development as equity training is not a separate issue and should be incorporated into all aspects of teacher professional development</li> </ul>
<p><b>Goal 3:</b> VUSD will effectively monitor incorporation of equity frameworks and pedagogy at both the site and District level.</p>	
<p><b>Short Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sites establish a systematic method to monitor identified targeted areas based on the data collected for the development of their mission statement.</li> <li>● Sites establish a systematic method to collect data and monitor areas of potential need on a regular basis in order to develop a site action plan to address need areas.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Long Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Incorporation of equity metrics into school site presentations to the VUSD Governing Board that outlines their data and proposed action plan</li> <li>● Following teacher professional development, teacher evaluations to include one district prescribed focus on equity in the development of goal areas for the evaluation period.</li> <li>● Establish a system that regularly monitors disproportionality in student participation in both accelerated and alternative programs. Data collected informs the development of an action plan</li> </ul>

	to address findings of disproportionality by identifying both root cases and steps for remediation.
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**Staffing**

**Equity Statement:** VUSD will display a commitment to valuing the diversity of it's staff by actively recruiting and retaining staff who are reflective of our student demographic and displaying a focus on promoting students' equitable access to their education, while also supporting current employees with professional development opportunities that prioritize topics which lead to greater equity across the organization.

**Goal 1:** VUSD will have an equity focused professional development program that is consistently delivered, dynamic and mandatory.

<p><b>Short Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Research and identify areas of need for staff training</li> <li>● Provide one mandatory training for all staff (certificated and classified)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Long Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Embed professional development for all staff to participate annually in equity and diversity training</li> </ul>
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**Goal 2:** VUSD will incorporate equity based practices into hiring practices.

<p><b>Short Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Craft an equity statement for hiring to be displayed on job advertisements</li> <li>● Require every interview to have at least one equity based question</li> <li>● Strive to create diverse and inclusive interview panels</li> </ul>	<p><b>Long Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facilitate collaboration among administrators focused on incorporating best practices into hiring procedures</li> </ul>
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**Goal 3:** VUSD will work toward better alignment of our employee and student demographic.

<p><b>Short Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identify key hiring metrics to monitor</li> <li>● Investigate marketing and branding</li> </ul>	<p><b>Long Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop and implement a consistent and agreed upon approach to "hiring for equity"</li> </ul>
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<p>ourselves as a welcoming, diverse community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Partner with the City of Vacaville in regards to equity work to help with the overall community perception</li> <li>● Pursue relationships with teacher preparation programs that have historically demonstrated graduating cohorts of a highly diverse ethnic makeup.</li> </ul>	
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<b>Discipline</b>	
<p><b>Equity Statement:</b> Our schools shall empower all students, staff, and community members to develop, monitor, and maintain fair, and proportional disciplinary practices, policies, and professional development to ensure all students receive individual, purposeful access to their education.</p>	
<p><b>Goal 1:</b> VUSD will track and monitor records to analyze, examine, report and address teacher processes that affect the over representation of students of color in discipline referrals.</p>	
<p><b>Short Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Schools will conduct assessments to identify effectiveness of programs currently at the school site that promote positive behaviors and interventions for students.</li> <li>● Collect data and identify patterns in student discipline referrals by staff and create opportunities to engage in dialogue on the disparity.</li> <li>● Educate staff on the Ed Code (old world vs. new world). Educating staff on other means of correction.</li> <li>● Support and educate staff whose</li> </ul>	<p><b>Long Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Require ongoing (yearly) professional development for all staff that supports learning in areas focused on a deeper understanding of culturally biased actions based on race, ethnicity, gender and social class.</li> <li>● Require ongoing (yearly) continual review of discipline policies and practices to identify and combat areas of racism and inequalities.</li> </ul>

<p>data shows discipline referrals discrepancies amongst students</p>	
<p><b>Goal 2:</b> VUSD will create culturally responsive discipline practices that allow for educators to draw on shared knowledge that honors students' heritage and cultural background.</p>	
<p><b>Short Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide mandatory trainings in Restorative Justice, Trauma Informed Practices to all staff</li> <li>● Create opportunities for staff to engage in intentional data driven decisions based on disciplinary discrepancies at the classroom and school level.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Long Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engage staff to adopt a restorative justice/ trauma informed approach along with other disciplinary strategies that address inappropriate conduct in productive and meaningful ways and avoid techniques that invite negative outcomes associated with many traditional responses</li> </ul>
<p><b>Goal 3:</b> VUSD will provide clear and honest communication to students, parents and staff on disciplinary policies and practices in order to empower, inform and educate. Schools will provide an array of resources and support available to students, staff, and parents.</p>	
<p><b>Short Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop a parent, student, staff handbook/pamphlet in multiple languages that can be provided to each member to improve their understanding of school policy, expectations, and resources.</li> <li>● Network with local (district/city/county) organizations to provide behavioral/counseling support and guidance to students and families who may be displaying social or behavior concerns.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Long Term Action Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engage students and parents at the school level to continue educating them on Policy, Procedures and Processes.</li> </ul>

# Future Equity Task Force Membership

The Equity Task Force has made significant progress towards the development of an initial equity impact action plan. As a team they engaged in building interpersonal capacity, including trust, engaged in learning about the historical system of racial oppression while investigating current policies and practices.

In regards to membership the Equity Task Force recommends the following:

- continue to culture safe space to promote group learning about:
  - the intricacies of what equity is
  - barriers to equity
  - strategies for making racial equity a reality
  
- formalize and standardize membership to include:
  - membership requirements
  - clarification of leadership roles
  - on-boarding new members
  - criteria and role of advisory staff

## **Recommendation of the Equity Task Force Membership Group:**

The Equity Task Force engaged in robust discussion about the membership groups and recommends an expansion of the sitting constituent groups to include membership from both the VUSD Governing Board and students. In addition, included in the Equity Task Force proposal regarding membership are guidelines about criteria, responsibilities, and roles of members.

The Equity Task Force proposes the following structure for membership in the future, consisting of the following five categories:

- Community Members
- VUSD Classified and Certificated Staff
- VUSD Administration
- VUSD Students
- VUSD Governing Board Representation

Community Members: The Equity Task Force shall consist of no fewer than three community members. Community members should reflect the diversity of the community at large. These members provide important information to the Equity Task Force regarding community expectations, student feedback, and support goal area development.

VUSD Classified and Certificated Staff: The Equity Task Force shall consist of no fewer than three non-administrative VUSD members. Classified and Certificated VUSD staff should include diversity reflective of VUSD employed staff. This partner group provides critical information and insight into pedagogy, methodology, student engagement, class/school climate and practices that promote student learning.

VUSD Administration: The Equity Task Force shall consist of no fewer than three VUSD Administrators. Administrators should be representative of the varied scope of district administrative roles and responsibilities. This constituent group provides information about policies and practices in VUSD, oversight to personnel and instruction, and monitors student data and school climate.

VUSD Students: The Equity Task Force shall consist of no fewer than three current or recently graduated VUSD Students. To be considered 'recently graduated' the member must have graduated from a VUSD school within the last three years. Members wishing to remain on the Equity Task Force beyond the three year post graduation requirement may be considered to join the "Community Member" group. This group provides important information about the student experience in VUSD schools.

VUSD Governing Board Representation: The Equity Task Force shall consist of two sitting VUSD Governing Board Representatives. VUSD Governing Board representatives provide the EFT information about policies, practices and initiatives of the Governing Board.

Member Selection Procedures: Vacancies in stakeholder groups will be filled via an application process. Applications will be made available in both paper and electronic formats consistent with the established District non-discriminatory procedures. Submitted applications will be reviewed by delegated Equity Task Force members. The application review delegation will be composed of one representative from each constituent group mentioned above.

### **Member Roles and Responsibility:**

Leadership Roles: The Equity Task force shall consist of the following leadership roles within the Task Force:

- **Chair:** The Chair of the ETF is responsible for developing the agenda and structure for the meetings. As the Chair, they will be delivering the expectations and ensure the conventions of the meeting are being followed. Meeting facilitation shall remain neutral throughout and ensure participation of all members.
- **Vice Chair:** The Vice Chair should be prepared to assume the role and responsibilities of the Chair in the event of an absence. The Vice Chair should maintain the focus of the agenda, ensuring that the meeting is progressing well and according to plan. The VC should remain neutral throughout the meeting,

keenly drawing out opinions from everyone involved.

- Secretary: The Secretary will be responsible for note taking and distribution of informational items related to this work.
- Attendance and Engagement Clerk: This individual will oversee the participation and attendance of its members and make recommendations to the Team regarding further accountability steps.

Leadership positions shall be filled for the duration of one (1) year with interested members identified by a nomination process. All ETF members shall submit one (1) vote for each identified vacancy. Either the Chair or Vice-Chair position shall be filled by District Administrative staff.

Attendance Requirement: Members should miss no more than two (2) Task Force meetings per school year. Members who miss two meetings in a school year will be contacted by a Task Force member to follow up and determine next steps. Members who do miss more than two (2) meetings per year may be asked to step down from the Task Force.

Engagement Requirement: Members should abide by the norms and expectations laid out by the current ETF in order to promote respectful, honest and transparent conversations.

Failure to Meet Requirements Procedures: Members who fail to demonstrate the attendance and engagement norms established by the ETF shall result in notification from the Attendance and Engagement Clerk. The member and the Attendance and Engagement Clerk may engage in a collaborative meeting to discuss barriers to performance. Failure to meet the expectations of the established norms may result in a removal from future ETF meetings.



## Concluding Statement

The Equity Task Force does not in any way intend this Equity Plan to be a summation document, but rather the first step in a long journey of reflection and change for the Vacaville Unified School District. It is our sincere hope that the Governing Board and Administration of VUSD will embrace these proposed actions, recognize and formalize the future work of the Equity Task Force as an advisory body in partnership with both the Board and the District.

*“Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle,”* were the words of Dr Martin Luther King Jr. that poignantly describes our journey through this equity work. Teachers, Support Staff, Administrators and the Governing Board can no longer passively wait for ‘the wheels of inevitability’ to generate the disruptive change necessary to support all students in the District. It is clear from the VUSD data collected and reviewed by the Equity Task Force that inaction is far too great a risk to take in order to support our teachers, staff and students in VUSD. It is the final recommendation of the Equity Task Force that we **all** must collectively engage in reflective practices, embrace this ‘continuous struggle’ and galvanize as a community in order to truly pursue real equity in VUSD.

## Resources/References

[A History: The Construction of Race and Racism](#)  
[Avoiding Racial Equity Detours article](#)  
[Equity Walk Tool](#)  
[Equity Impact Action Plan Process Notes](#)  
[Glossary of Terms](#)  
[History of Public Education Padlet](#)  
[Listening Sessions](#)  
[Water of System’s Change article](#)  
[Water of System’s Change action plan exercise](#)