

## BOARD REPORT

# A Culture of Dignity: Foundation for Educational Equity

Allison Munch-Rotolo

Equity is a primary concern in school districts everywhere, and rightly so. Educators are frequently – almost constantly, it seems – engaged in personal and professional development activities to understand and redress historic injustices and improve the effectiveness of their current practice. Yet despite the importance of the problem and significant efforts toward solutions, educational outcomes continue to demonstrate inequity almost everywhere, including here in Pullman.

A new book, *Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity: The Keys to Successful Equity Implementation*, sheds light on the frustratingly cyclical nature of equity work. The authors, **Cobb** and **Krownapple**, argue that traditional approaches (such as diversity trainings and committees, often formed in the wake of a catalyzing event) are, at best, not as effective in producing long-term positive change as we want them to be. At worst, these approaches can be counter-productive, causing further marginalization of the very people the efforts are intended to help.

Even more powerful than standing against something (such as prejudice and discrimination or bullying) is developing a shared vision of what we are for: inclusion. Familiar to many already, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is sometimes used to visually represent the idea that humans will first address basic needs (such as survival and safety) before moving to higher-order needs (like educational achievement). Accordingly, the Culture of Dignity perspective holds that learning depends on students' having their needs met by experiencing a sense of belonging. Our local school district mission of fostering learning is thus crucially affected by the learning environment we provide, and the extent to which everyone in it feels appreciated, validated, accepted, and treated

fairly.

The Dignity Model developed by conflict resolution specialist **Dr. Donna Hicks** of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government recommends specific strategies and practices that redress past violations of dignity, helping to build relationships based on trust and mutual understanding. Most recommended practices can be applied to any organization, and some are particularly well-suited to the K-12 setting. For example, the dignity-affirming practice of extending positive greetings at the door – something many district employees do already – is positively associated with academic engagement and negatively associated with disruptive behaviors. A simple cultural practice can be linked to improved student achievement.

After attending (virtually) the Washington State School Directors' Association annual conference last November, the school board reaffirmed its commitment to equity. The board added an Equity Report as a standing item on every school board agenda, and it requested that Superintendent **Maxwell** convene a student panel, allowing the board to hear directly from students about which equity issues should be prioritized. The district's administrative team is currently reading *A Culture of Dignity* and discussing how these powerful ideas might apply in their daily experiences. This work could result in a learning environment that is not only more tolerant of, nor even merely open to, but absolutely affirming of the humanity and dignity of all the district's students, staff, and families.

*The opinions expressed in Board Reports are those of individual school board members and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the board as a whole or of Pullman Public Schools.*

The Pullman School District Board of Directors and the Pullman School District shall provide equal educational opportunity and treatment for all students in all aspects of the academic and activities programs without regard to race, religion, creed, color, national origin, age, honorably-discharged veteran or military status, sex, sexual orientation (including gender expression or identity), marital status, the presence of any sensory, mental or physical disability, participation in the Boy Scouts of America or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability. The district will provide equal access to school facilities to the Boy Scouts of America and all other designated youth groups listed in Title 36 of the United States Code as a patriotic society. District programs will be free from sexual harassment.

The following employee has been designated to handle questions and complaints of alleged discrimination: **Roberta Kramer**, Assistant Superintendent, Pullman School District Administrative Offices, 240 SE Dexter Street, Pullman, WA 99163, 509.332.3144. Applicants with disabilities may request reasonable accommodations in the application process by contacting the Personnel Coordinator at (509) 332-3584.

## Board of Directors

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## Child Find 2020-2021

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING

This screening is an opportunity to identify, locate, and evaluate children who might have a disability and to address potential concerns. This is available to children (birth through 5 years of age) living within Pullman School District's boundaries.

**SAVE THE DATE!**



**APRIL**  
**16**  
FRIDAY

**MAY**  
**7**  
FRIDAY

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT PLEASE CONTACT PULLMAN SCHOOL DISTRICT'S INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS OFFICE AT 509-332-3144.

PULLMAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## 2021-2022 ENROLLMENT

- Kindergarten Online Enrollment Opens:  
**April 19th, 2021**
- All Grades Online Enrollment Opens:  
**May 3rd, 2021**

Please visit our website for more information about enrolling your student for the 2021-22 school year  
[www.pullmanschools.org/enrollment](http://www.pullmanschools.org/enrollment)

## Join Us!

### Pullman High School Booster Committee LOOKING FOR NEW OFFICERS FOR THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR!

The Greyhound Booster Committee is Pullman High School's version of a PTA or PTSA, combined with a traditional sports booster club. The Boosters help supplement our PHS Booster clubs and sports with grants to purchase items that the ASB budget doesn't cover. Most of our officers have students graduating this spring, and feel it's important to have families with students benefiting from the decisions made by the Boosters, take the reins.

**The PHS Booster Committee is in need of:**

- ✓ **President**
- ✓ **Vice President (or Co-Presidents)**
- ✓ **Secretary**
- ✓ **Treasurer**

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BEING AN OFFICER FOR THE PHS BOOSTER COMMITTEE FOR THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR, OR WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT CURRENT CO-PRESIDENT, DANIELLE KALLAHER, AT [PULLMANHIGHBOOSTERPRESIDENT@GMAIL.COM](mailto:PULLMANHIGHBOOSTERPRESIDENT@GMAIL.COM)

# Importance of HOPE

*Jim Bruce, Principal, Jefferson Elementary School*

The challenges that your children and our students faced this past year have been unlike any that most have ever faced as a child or youth; or for that matter, us as adults. On a moment's notice our students went from a traditional "brick and mortar" model to a distance learning model. Suddenly terms such as Zoom, Seesaw, Google Classroom, Week at a Glance (WAAG), synchronous, and asynchronous became part of our everyday educational language. Lost were the lifetime memories of the prom, 5th grade camp, sports, creation of new friendships in various classrooms, music and drama performances, first day of school as a kindergarten student, LMS 6th grader or PHS Freshman, and so on.

With each of the fore mentioned and numerous unmentioned losses it would be understandable for our students to feel and develop a sense of "hopelessness." Unfortunately, even if COVID-19 never happened, there are children and youth in our schools and our community that live day-to-day with "hopelessness" while others have a "hopeful" attitude. Why is this the case?

**What is hope?** There are many different definitions for "hope", but two I like seem to really encapsulate the meaning of "hope." The first one being, "Hope is a vision, fueled by both positive feelings and inspired/smart actions." With the second one being, "Hope is the ability to visit our future, return to the present and prepare for the journey." As parents, grandparent, aunts, uncles, teachers, school support staff, and school administrators isn't this exactly what we should be cultivating with our children and students every single day of the school year, be it in-person or by way of distance learning?

**Why is having hope important?** Researchers have found that students who are high in hope have greater academic success, stronger friendships, and demonstrate more creativity and better problem-solving. They also have lower levels of depression and anxiety and are less likely to drop out from school. Studies suggest that having hope may actually predict a student's future academic achievement more than having feelings of self-worth or a positive attitude towards life actually do.

**Why do some children and youth succeed and others fail?** As a result of this interdisciplinary examination several profound recurring themes consistently appeared in the literature. The most prominent of those themes include:

- Children who succeed seem to do so when they have people in their lives who believe they can succeed.
- Children who succeed have meaningful relationships with caring adults. (Children who fail are disconnected from those meaningful relationships and grow up in our institutions, programs, services and activities anonymously.)
- Children who succeed have multiple goals and an understanding that their futures must include contributions made in home and family; education and career; community and service; and hobbies and recreation.
- Children who succeed are offered greater opportunities to develop their strengths rather than to correct their weaknesses.
- Children who succeed are nurtured by a culture that is focused on success and strengths.

The good news is that hopelessness is learned and can be reversed through care while hope can be cultivated, even among students who are at risk for losing it. But first we have to understand what scientists mean when they talk about hope.

Hope doesn't mean wishful thinking—as in "I hope I win the lottery." Instead, a student who is high in hope knows how to do the following:

- Set clear and attainable goals.
- Develop multiple strategies to reach those goals.
- Stay motivated to use the strategies to attain the goals, even when the going gets tough.

**How do we ensure that every student in our schools are capable to do the previously mentioned three bullet points? By responding to the research with these five cultural beliefs and practices:**

**First**, eliminate the expression "at risk." This expression demeans children and has been so maligned that its meaning sways in the wind according to the person or group using it. It offers no real value to help children succeed. Replacing "youth at risk" with "kids at hope" focuses on strengths and opportunities, and

sets the child up for success. Even the child who is considered most "at risk" is now treated as an asset, rather than a liability.

**Second**, create a cultural belief system rather than just another well-meaning program on top of thousands of well-meaning but disconnected programs. Offer a courageous and bold action-driven statement, which resonates throughout an agency, institution, and community. Unlike organizational mission statements, belief systems aren't owned by any one group, but can be used to share a common cause and unite communities around the strengths of a child.

**Third**, understand that one of the great differences between children who succeed and those who fail is the fact that children who succeed seem to have meaningful relationships with caring adults. Children who fail are disconnected from those meaningful relationships and grow up in our institutions, agencies, programs and communities anonymously.

**Fourth**, create a language of strengths and opportunities for children. Ensure that an entire school community can use the language. This language must be simple and specific and describe behaviors.

**Fifth**, ensure that all children are able and empowered to articulate their future. Identify the four major destination points in life where we expect and need our children to contribute are one's Home and

Family; Education and Career; Community and Service; and Hobbies and Recreation. The capacity to contribute to each of these destination points results in success, achieving one's potential and becoming a contributing member of society. Catch-phrases are no longer appropriate; instead, we need a clear understanding of what is required for success in terms of abilities, talents, traits, characteristics and knowledge, and where it must happen for one to truly achieve success.

We know through research and experience that when a student has a "hopeful" attitude coupled with an organizational belief that "All children are capable of success, NO EXCEPTIONS!" success for a child's four major destination points in life is limitless. Whether students are returning to in-person learning or are continuing in a distance learning model Pullman Public School teachers, paraeducators, support staff and administrators realize the significant importance of cultivating a culture of "hope" for every single student every single day due to the challenging year that they've just experienced.

## Let's be social!

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[www.facebook.com/PullmanHS](https://www.facebook.com/PullmanHS)

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