

Social Media Report: Actions and Recommendations



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PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Acknowledgements

This report was drafted by Superintendent Xavier Botana with the assistance of district HR staff and of employees of Drummond Woodsum, the district's legal counsel, functioning as paid consultants to the Superintendent. The overwhelming majority of the investigative interviews were conducted by Drummond Woodsum investigator Ann Chapman and HR Assistant Director Richard Moore. Follow-up interviews and the conclusion of investigation meetings with staff involved were conducted by the Superintendent with Mr. Moore. The final disposition correspondence was drafted by the Superintendent and Mr. Moore.

I would like to recognize the tremendous amount of work that went into this investigation and report. I am grateful to the staff mentioned above as well as Anne Rothacker and Tess Nacelewicz for their editing assistance. I would also like to express my appreciation to the staff who participated in the investigation and their Portland Education Association and Portland Administrators Association representatives for recognizing the importance of this issue and being open to sharing information and processing the conclusions from the investigation.

I would also like to thank the non-district individuals that agreed to operate as conduits for additional reports: Blanca Santiago, Lelia DeAndrade and Pious Ali.

Finally, as a district, we owe a debt of gratitude to the students and former students who raised these issues. While anonymous social media allegations are not the ideal manner to bring these issues to the district's attention, it is how they chose to speak their truths. I am hopeful that this report will serve as some degree of closure for them.

Letter from Superintendent [Xavier Botana](#)

One weekend this past June, we awoke to a flurry of allegations posted on social media by current and former students of the Portland Public Schools. The posts continued for several days and made multiple claims against present and past Portland Public Schools staff and against the institution itself. The posts included claims about students experiences of sexual harassment, gender, identity and racial bias and discrimination while in the Portland Public Schools.

As the leader of this organization, I care deeply about the reputation of the Portland Public Schools, and one of my core responsibilities is preserving its brand. As a district, a central part of our identity is being the largest and most diverse school district in Northern New England. We promote that identity because we strive to be a place where students from different backgrounds learn side by side and challenge each other to understand the benefits of that diversity. We aspire to being progressive and anti-racist and to bringing about social justice through the act of educating diverse students to be truth seers, truth tellers and agents of change.

In this context, the claims clearly told us that the lived experiences of many of our students do not reflect our greatest aspirations. So we accepted the claims and have endeavored to make sense of them in the context of who we are and who we want to be. We investigated the allegations and took appropriate steps to understand the truth behind the specific claims. We also endeavored to learn and articulate lessons from the claims that can help us to continue to grow and become what we want to be.

This report to the Portland Public Schools community is part of a series of steps that we have taken and are continuing to take to that end. I have reported in detail to the Board of Public Education. Every person named in the June posts who still works in the Portland Public Schools has been asked to reckon with the claims through our investigation. While this report does not provide details about that reckoning, we took exhaustive steps to bring closure to each individual situation.

More important, perhaps, are the generalizations, lessons and actions that are noted in the report. Some of these actions are already in progress – many were in progress prior to the posts – and others are provided for consideration.

One important next step is the publication of this report. It is my hope that the report will inspire continued dialogue about what we need to do to become what we aspire to be.

It is also my hope that this report is not used to denigrate the people who work in the district. Throughout this process, I have only grown in my respect and appreciation for the challenges of teaching and leading. The posts were hard to read for someone who wasn't named, but they were excruciating for those who were. I have had countless conversations with many of those people. I have seen firsthand how they have suffered, grieved and learned.

Finally, I hope that this report provides a measure of closure to those students past and present who shared their experiences. I want them to know that we listened to them, we heard them and we learned from them. I also want them to know that we recognize that this report is a small step and that the trauma they experienced while in the Portland Public Schools will not be washed away by this report. I hope that to the extent that they see an institution that is clear-eyed in assessing its failings, they will attain a measure of hope and resilience.

Portland Board of Public Education Statement

Early in the summer of 2020, as many as 60 current and former Portland Public Schools students wrote about experiences in which they alleged that school staff had acted in racist, misogynist, and disrespectful and unprofessional ways. The comments were posted on social media, with the authors' names redacted, by a Deering High School graduate. These stories were shared in the wake of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Chance Baker, David Okot, and other Black men and women.

The allegations named 39 current staff and 19 former staff at all three of Portland's high schools and two of the district's middle schools.

We are indebted to the students who came forward for their courage in speaking out. Their perseverance helps compensate for our systemic and cultural inadequacies.

This Board and this district will not tolerate racism, misogyny, and unprofessional behavior in our community and schools.

The allegations are disappointing but not surprising and confirm our priority as a Board and district to become a more just and equitable institution. We are deeply committed to creating a climate of respect, inclusion, and equity for all.

As a school district, we took these allegations seriously and investigated every claim, but in most cases our ability to take disciplinary action against staff was limited because the allegations were nearly all anonymous. In addition to the investigations, Superintendent Xavier Botana personally met with every current staff member named in the allegations to reflect on the significance of the allegations and discuss training and coaching opportunities. We are grateful to the Superintendent for leading a full investigation and pursuing the allegations as far as possible, as well as for seeing the allegations broadly as a window into students' lived experiences and their perceptions of school, and indicative of the work ahead of us.

While there is much work to do, in October we passed a strong new policy and procedures to prevent and respond to incidents of harassment, discrimination, and sexual harassment. The policy includes a focus on prevention, education, and training of all staff as well as clear, accessible, standard, and mandatory procedures for reporting and responding to incidents that center students who are targeted. We are starting to implement that policy now, and it will be fully implemented by the end of this school year. We also have begun work on a district Equity Policy, which we expect to be considered by the full board this fall. Additionally, we passed our Transgender and Gender Expansive Policy in 2017, have supported several equity initiatives, such as the creation of an Equity Coordinator position (now Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) and an equity audit of key policies that has guided our policy work, and our Policy Committee is currently considering major revisions to our discipline policies.

We strongly support the additional steps that Superintendent Botana identifies in this report as possible further actions, including establishing an ombudsman, organizing school-level restorative dialogues, requiring course evaluations by students, and additional and ongoing training of our staff, including in equity and implicit bias, among other topics.

We are grateful that many of the staff identified in the allegations demonstrated humility and were able to reflect on the stories being shared back to them. We all need to do this work, reflecting, interrupting

harmful behaviors, and acting anew. We all play a role in either making our schools places that affirm our students' many identities or places that harm our students' right to be free of biased abuse and violence. A daily, low hum of violence in the form of inappropriate comments and actions is not acceptable.

We as a Board stand in unity with our students in stating that these and similar transgressions must end, and we reaffirm our commitment to building and sustaining a climate of respect, inclusion, and equity for all in our schools.

Overview of the Report

This report is a comprehensive review of the social media-based allegations that were filed during the summer of 2020 and the subsequent steps taken to investigate those allegations. This report is intended to provide stakeholders across the community with an accounting of the allegations and the steps the district administration took to investigate the allegations. The report also provides a summary of lessons derived from the investigation and what the district is doing and needs to do to create a culture where there will be fewer instances of the types of issues raised by the students and former students that are the subject of this report.

This report does not associate names with the specific investigative actions and information about individuals mentioned in the allegations. That information is considered personnel material and as such is only available to the individuals entitled to that information under Maine law.

This report is the culmination of the investigative process. That process included appropriate disciplinary steps in some cases and led to significant reflection and introspection by many of the individuals involved. That process does not end with the publication of this report. This report is intended to be a source of further processing and reflection at the individual, school, district and community level. It is my hope that it will be seen as part of the district's ongoing efforts to become an increasingly safe, equitable and just institution as articulated in the district's comprehensive plan, the Portland Promise.

Introduction

In June 2020, the Portland Public Schools (PPS) learned that a 2017 Deering High School (DHS) graduate (referred to hereafter as D.G.) had posted on social media about their concerns about DHS and the PPS in general. D.G. invited other current and former students to send private messages about their experiences with PPS as well. D.G. received many messages, which made disturbing allegations of sexist, misogynistic, racist and otherwise disrespectful behaviors of staff members toward current and former students from all three PPS high schools and some of our middle schools. D.G. posted all of the messages publicly on Twitter, with all names of the senders redacted (at the request of those who had sent the messages).

The reports were made at the height of the national reckoning with institutional and systemic bias that happened in response to the killing of George Floyd and the protests across the country that followed that event. Across the country there were similar postings and public "outings" directed at schools, universities, government entities and businesses.

As a school district that prides itself on its diversity and commitment to equity, these allegations were a stark reminder that we are not immune to these claims. As such, we organized to address the claims and leverage the moment for introspection and action.

I recognized that the first step was to fully investigate the claims. The investigation included the following steps:

- To provide current and former students multiple options for coming forward, I requested a number of outside agencies and individuals to be available to take complaints regarding PPS from individual complainants and refer those willing to come forward to Drummond Woodsum or to me for an interview;
- I posted a notice on the PPS website inviting anyone with concerns about the schools to contact me or the other resources and supports listed (see Attachment).
- I met with D.G. to enlist their support in reaching out to students involved who posted allegations to explain the investigation process and encourage them to come forward with any additional claims and provide statements that could be used in the investigation;
- I asked the school district's legal counsel, Drummond Woodsum, to conduct an independent assessment and investigation into the social media posts;

- Upon completion of the investigative process, appropriate steps were taken to formally conclude the investigation and maintain appropriate personnel records of the investigation.

Additionally, through the investigative process, learnings emerged and formed into generalizations about the district and what we needed to do going forward to leverage these posts for further growth as an institution.

I. The Social Media Posts – Content and Concerns

A. Information About Those Who Posted Concerns

D.G. provided screenshots of the social media posts about staff members to PPS with the authors' names redacted. A total of 104 pages of screenshots were provided, although some of the screenshots were duplicates. The actual number of different individuals who posted is difficult to ascertain without seeing all the original messages in intact form, but it appears that there may have been up to 60 individuals who submitted comments.

Most of the individuals who posted messages did not identify their current grade level or year of graduation. However, some individuals who posted (and individuals who came forward for an interview) did provide this information. There was a wide range in dates when individuals attended PPS, including some from the early 2000s up to the present.

- One 2020 DHS graduate
- One 2019 DHS graduate
- Two 2018 DHS graduates
- Three 2017 DHS graduates
- One 2015 PHS graduate
- One 2014 DHS graduate and two CBHS graduates
- Two DHS juniors
- One DHS sophomore
- One PHS student with class undisclosed

B. Interviews of Individuals Who Came Forward

In the course of the investigation, a total of three DHS graduates directly contacted Ms. Chapman (one of whom had also posted on social media) as did one PHS graduate. They were willing to disclose their names. In addition, Ms. Chapman spoke with D.G., who was accompanied by a friend (also a DHS graduate). D.G. was asked if D.G. would be willing to identify the individuals who had posted comments so that PPS could follow up with them, but D.G. had promised these individuals anonymity. PPS had no other way of ascertaining their identities, except by publicly inviting the posters and others to come forward for an interview about their experiences.

In addition to the interviews conducted by Ms. Chapman, I also spoke to one current DHS student and two DHS staff members.

C. Staff Identified

Many of the posts identified PPS staff members by name, and some discussed multiple staff members in their posts. While many posts discussed staff members who are currently employed by PPS, there were also numerous posts about staff members who are no longer PPS employees. Posts included staff at three of the district's high schools and two middle schools.

The breakdown of active and inactive staff members identified in posts and in interviews was as follows:

PPS High Schools

- 37 active staff members with negative posts
- 3 active staff members with positive posts
- 18 inactive staff members with negative posts

PPS Middle Schools

- 2 active staff members with negative posts
- 1 inactive staff member with negative posts

In addition to identifying specific staff members, a number of posters made general comments about PPS as a whole, a particular school, or the administration or a department in a particular school.

D. Issues Raised in Posts and Interviews

A summary of the most common types of issues raised in the posts and interviews follows, including verbatim quotes to provide an unvarnished look at the individuals' perceptions of their experiences with PPS. They are organized into general areas.

1. Gender Issues

The current and former students made a number of allegations about male staff members having inappropriate interactions with female students, as well as about sexist jokes and favoritism in grading toward females. In addition, there were concerns raised about several staff members' interactions with students on issues of gender identity and sexual orientation.

a. Inappropriate interactions with female students

Most of the allegations/perceptions involved looking at students' chests, physical contact with students (but no allegations of sexual contact), flirting or making sexual comments to students, such as this representative post:

"Any time one of the girls would wear a crop top, commenting on how he could see their belly button."

b. Sexist jokes and comments

Some individuals alleged that staff members made sexist jokes and comments, such as in this representative post:

"He gave us a half-hearted apology for making the dumb blonde joke and just continued on his behavior."

c. Favoritism in grading

Some individuals alleged that female students were graded differently from male students based on their appearance, as shown in this representative post:

"He would give me really good grades in his class while my male friends received bad grades for the same work."

d. Gender identity and sexual orientation

There were several comments from individuals about lack of sensitivity to students based on gender identity and sexual orientation, as in this representative post:

"I asked [a staff member] if I could change [my name]...told me that it was connected to my 'real' name (her words not mine) and it couldn't be changed.... I didn't feel comfortable with posting my answer where all my classmates could see my deadname...."

2. Race/National Origin Issues

Current and former students made a number of allegations about how staff members interacted with students of color. These concerns were raised by both white individuals and individuals of color. The allegations included issues such as students of color being treated less favorably in class in terms of discipline and/or grading, and about teachers making insensitive remarks to students of color. Included was this representative post:

"Seemingly 'innocent jokes' (his words not mine) about me wearing my hijab cause I couldn't take care of my hair."

3. Professional Boundary Issues

There were a number of allegations about staff members not maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with students. The following is a representative post:

"Talking about our sex lives with us, making sex jokes, making jokes about me."

4. Curriculum/Program Issues

Several individuals posted comments that there was a "white-centric" focus in the curriculum/programs, or that teachers were not sensitive in dealing with racial and other issues with students, such as in this representative post:

"Many...teachers harbor many types of thinly-veiled racisms and savior complexes that are DETRIMENTAL to the mental health and wellbeing of not just the non-white students of color, but the Black and Brown students whom a large part are immigrants as well...must be addressed en masse in order for these teachers to be held accountable, to unlearn and decolonize the inner cop they all hard within themselves and to learn proper racial sensitivity training."

5. Lack of Responsiveness by Administration

There was a common perception among many individuals that even when they brought concerns about staff members to the administration, nothing was done or nothing changed, as in this representative post:

"Many girls and I signed a petition saying that he made us feel...objectified, and nothing changed."

6. Lack of Support to Students

Individuals posted a number of comments about not feeling supported by particular staff members to be successful at school, as in this representative example:

"My [school staff member] ignored my bullying complaints to the point that I got in touch with a former superintendent...I considered dropping out mid-way through my senior year."

7. Broad Claims Against the School System as an Unjust Institution

In D.G.'s communications with PPS administration and with Ms. Chapman, D.G. made clear that D.G. and other students were hoping for systemic reform to address the issues raised.

In addition, there was one lengthy post from three friends who had gone to four different PPS middle and high schools, and graduated in 2014, calling for systemic changes. Although these individuals graduated several years ago, they voiced a perception that systemic issues in PPS (and society) still need to be addressed, and stressed the importance of the schools in students' lives. These posters stated in part:

"As we have grown up we come to learn more about the enormity of actions and behaviors of our former superiors (coaches, teachers and staff members)....There were blatant abuses of power, predatory behaviors, racism, that should not be tolerated in our school system or anywhere any longer. Our systems of education have ALWAYS been rooted in systemic oppression and power structures. Kids spend the majority of their lives at school, they are in a sense raised by their teachers and coaches. How dare we continue to give them a dangerous experience that almost always impacts their entire life, especially our Black and BIPOC who are almost guaranteed a racist or other dangerous experience through PPS, and who continue to be disrespected and degraded within our community. We all, especially as the white members of our community need to step up, speak out on these realities and work to eradicate their practice. It is our responsibility to make our communities inclusive and safe for ALL members, not just the white people."

While these posters were focused primarily on the experience of students of color, it was clear from a full reading of the posts that many female and LGBTQ students also felt similarly disrespected and degraded by their experiences.

II. The PPS Response to the Social Media Complaints

A. A Note on Using the Posts as the Basis for Action

There are some important issues to note in regard to the posts and limited number of student interviews. First and most significantly, the posts, with the exception of D.G.'s, were all anonymous to PPS, which makes it very difficult to fully investigate the allegations and also impossible to have a dialogue among any of the individuals involved to try to make things right. In spite of efforts to have individuals come forward, few were willing to do so.

Regarding the nature of some of the posts, it is important to also note that many of the posts concern experiences that students had a number of years ago, and involve staff members who are no longer employed. While many of the posts concern individuals' personal experiences and perceptions of the schools, there were also many posts that relied, at least in part, on second-hand information obtained from others. In addition, many posts discussed rumors and perceptions about particular staff members that appear to have been passed among students over a period of years (something that happens in many school districts).

While these limitations are noted, they do not minimize the need for action to address the concerns identified. Although mostly anonymous, the allegations warranted careful investigation, which we have done. The posts provide very important information about the lived experiences and perceptions of school held by the individual students – and doubtless many other students have similar experiences and perceptions. There are lessons to be learned here for PPS that deserve the serious concern and attention which we have given them thus far, and the actions and changes that are sure to come.

B. Investigatory Interviews and Follow-Up Meetings with Individual Staff Members Named in Posts

Drummond Woodsum staff, working with the district's HR department, reviewed and assessed the posts and interviews to identify all the allegations that, if proven, could lead to disciplinary action against the staff members who were named (and who were still employed by PPS).

Based on their review, the staff were divided into two groups. One group was designated for follow-up interviews based on the number of claims filed, whether there was additional corroborating information, and whether the claims, if proven, would be cause for disciplinary action. Ms. Chapman, accompanied by Assistant H.R. Director Richard Moore (for all except one interview, which H.R. Director Barbara Stoddard attended), interviewed 12 teachers and coaches (most of whom were represented by the PEA and an attorney), as well as the current DHS administrators. Attorney Smith interviewed the current PHS administrators, accompanied by Mr. Moore. Ms. Chapman and Attorney Smith provided me with detailed summaries of the interviews.

In total, 17 administrators, teachers and coaches were interviewed in July, August and September about the allegations in which they were identified. Each was provided with the content of the posts that referenced them, was questioned about the facts and given an opportunity to respond. These individuals uniformly denied any allegations of misconduct that could be the basis for disciplinary action.

In order to discipline an educator, there must be evidence proving violations of a school rule or expectation; the educator has the right to know the identity of any witnesses; and the educator has the right to respond and present any relevant evidence. Anonymous reports alone do not meet this standard, and discipline based on them would not be upheld if the teacher filed a grievance. Since sufficient admissible evidence establishing educator misconduct has not been provided, and each educator has denied the material, anonymous allegations, discipline is not a viable option as a response to the anonymous social media posts. To be clear, the fact that disciplinary responses would not meet applicable standards in the law and union contracts does not mean that the complaints are not credible and cannot form the basis for other significant actions, as described below.

While the anonymous reports may be insufficient to support discipline, they were used as a starting point for discussions with the individuals about being knowledgeable about and sensitive to issues of bias, boundaries and professionalism when dealing with students. Two staff members who received an investigatory interview subsequently resigned. Two additional staff members received verbal warnings. I met with the other individuals who received an investigatory interview to discuss the allegations, to reflect on the significance of the allegations, and to discuss coaching and training opportunities. These meetings were followed by correspondence to document that they were either cleared of wrongdoing or to document the disciplinary actions taken.

The remaining claims were not designated for investigation because they were not deemed as rising to the level of possible disciplinary action. In this category, a staff member who was not investigated resigned and a former staff member was blocked from seeking further work in the district. I did meet with each of the other staff members who were identified in the posts to discuss the allegations, to reflect with each staff member on the significance of the allegations, and to discuss coaching and training opportunities. All together, I held individual conversations with over thirty current staff mentioned in the social media reports.

There was also broad agreement that the social media outpouring represents an ongoing challenge for us as an organization. Staff consistently shared their dismay and concern about how these types of claims sit in the larger setting of their careers. Several staff spoke of lost sleep and other mental health challenges prompted by these allegations. Across the board, they asked for understanding by investigators, their supervisors and the broader public that the claims represent moments in otherwise exemplary careers dedicated to teaching and administering public schools.

In reviewing the claims with staff, it was remarkable how often staff could not recall the specific instance, but upon reflection saw themselves in the claims. I was proud of the level of ownership and introspection evidenced in these conversations. I was encouraged by the degree to which staff reflected on how this experience, which was harrowing for many of them, was also an opportunity for learning and improvement.

III. Ongoing Work

In addition to the investigation of the claims made, the allegations offer an opportunity for reflection on our role and culture as a school system. As Maine's largest and most diverse school district, we must hold ourselves to the highest standard of responsibility. It should not be lost on us that many of those making allegations had been gone from the Portland Public Schools for a significant period of time. Many of those posting are young adults making their way through life. Yet, they were sufficiently marked by their experiences in the Portland Public Schools to post with urgency and with often poignant details on how their experiences while students in our district shaped them and weighed on their minds still.

As educators, we recognize that our actions matter. As educators, we are often amazed at how small actions we took—actions that we often don't remember—were the catalysts of a life choice that a former student tells us set them on a course for success. We take pride in those instances as we should. The claims discussed in this report are the other side of that coin. As such, we own them to the same degree. Both are cause for reflection, learning and action. We need to reflect on the fact that every interaction with a student has the potential to be one that will be remembered by that student for a lifetime.

In all, there are several themes that emerged from these allegations. One is that the protocols and processes for reporting concerns are not seen as responsive or accessible by students. There is also evidence from the allegations and subsequent investigation that PPS does not have clear common understandings of what to do when a claim is made by a student both in terms of investigation and in terms of bringing closure to the situation. Finally, the district has historically not done enough to bring these claims to light, leading to lingering questions and fostering a culture of rumor and innuendo that is evident in some of the claims in the social media allegations.

As a district, we have taken steps to address some of the underlying issues raised in these allegations. The next section of the report reviews some of the actions that the district has already taken or that are in progress. The allegations are a cautionary reminder that we cannot be complacent in thinking that implementing policies, procedures, training and other administrative actions means we have resolved all issues, but that we should continue to be vigilant in assessing whether we are achieving the results we seek, and to be reflective and face our shortcomings with constructive action on an ongoing basis.

District-level action is not the only outcome of this process. District high schools have stepped up their efforts to reflect on their climate and culture. Casco Bay High School conducted an Equity Summit last year and is in the process of doing that again this coming month. The Summit builds off of student survey data and will result in a vision statement for becoming an anti-racist institution. The Deering High School Climate and Culture team, to some extent prompted by the social media allegations, has prioritized developing a stronger restorative discipline culture. Portland High School staff participated in reading Ibram Kendi's "How to be an Antiracist" over the summer and are starting another book talk in January, reading "We Want to do More Than Survive" by Bettina Love. Creation of an "Equity Filter" committee, composed of staff and students, is in the development process.

It is our explicit intention to have the report serve as the catalyst for more actions in all of our schools and in the district at large. The report outlines additional action steps that should be considered based on the nature of these allegations. The steps below are part of our current and envisioned efforts to address these themes.

A. Actions Taken Prior to or in Direct Response to the Allegations

1. Gender Expansive Policy

[Policy JB](#)—Transgender and Gender Expansive Policy was adopted in 2017. This policy represents a statement of commitment to supporting gender expansive students in the school district. In addition to the passage of the policy, there were steps taken to make it possible for students to change their name on school records. The district engaged with students at the time of the policy development to first create the policy and then support its implementation in schools.

2. Equity Training, Equity Cohort and Equity Audits

As part of the district's strategic plan, the Portland Promise, also adopted in 2017, we rolled out a number of initiatives to create a more systematic approach to creating awareness and guide movement towards becoming an anti-racist and just school system. Among the steps outlined in the plan was the creation of an Equity Coordinator position (now Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion). The plan also called for the implementation of Equity Audits. To date, several school-based audits of practices have been conducted by the Center for Educational Equity (CEE). CEE also conducted an Equity Audit of discipline policies in 2019 that is guiding the ongoing review of multiple existing policies and the development of an Equity Policy. The district is now in its third year of an Equity Cohort. This group of staff from every school in the district meets regularly to co-plan and subsequently deliver training on equity-related issues to staff at their respective schools and to reflect on the issues that they are finding in their buildings as they advance this work.

3. Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Policy

In the Fall of 2019, the School Board decided to carry out a comprehensive review of the district's Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Policy ([ACAA](#) and [ACAA-R](#)), largely in response to advocacy from students, former students and organizations working to support victims of sexual harassment and abuse. This policy review was recently completed after an extensive process that included representatives from many of the organizations that brought the issue to the district's attention. This comprehensive policy is only now being operationalized and will require additional investments by the district in order to fully realize its value.

4. Discipline Policies Review and Equity Policy

Throughout this past Fall, the district has engaged in a comprehensive review of discipline policies and the development of an Equity Policy. Both of these actions were being considered prior to the social media allegations reviewed in this report. But the importance of this work was elevated by these social media allegations. Both efforts should be completed before the end of the current school year.

5. Annual Student Survey

Since 2018, the district has conducted an annual survey of student perceptions, focused on the Whole Student Portland Promise Goal of determining the degree to which students feel safe and supported at school and have a meaningful connection with a caring adult. Middle school and elementary student surveys have been conducted annually (with the exception of last year because of the pandemic). High school students are administered the biennial Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) instead. Data from these surveys are reported at the district level and used by school leadership teams to inform their improvement efforts.

6. Curriculum Review

Several of the concerns raised by students were not directed solely at individuals but reflected a generalized experience of attending a diverse school yet seldom seeing the life experiences, history and cultures of significant portions of the student population reflected in

what is taught, how it is taught and by whom it is taught. These concerns were known to the district and have been the focus of some of the district's work to diversify its workforce and, more recently, to engage in curriculum work with a lens toward decolonizing what and how we teach through new courses and curriculum. The district has also begun a process of revising its Health curriculum at the high school level to respond to concerns about sexuality, gender identity and sexual harassment.

B. Additional Actions for Consideration

The following list of additional measures is not intended to be exhaustive. Over the course of subsequent conversations, these and other possible measures should be considered. Many of these measures require additional resources and/or ongoing discussion and agreement with multiple parties.

1. Ombudsman

As noted, the social media posts highlighted the fact that some students/former students came forward with concerns within their school and they perceived that nothing changed as a result. Some students/former students said they had no idea that they could have raised a concern while they were still in school or did not know how. This highlights an opportunity for us to create a system to make it easier for students and others to raise concerns about PPS to a central resource, which can ensure that complaints are addressed in a fair and consistent manner, and with clear communication. The district has in the past couple of years experimented with this concept by sending complaints that have run their course through the internal investigative process to the district's counsel for review and intervention. This model, or an internal staff resource, should be explored as part of the next budget year and the implementation of the recently amended ACAA policy.

2. School Level Restorative Dialogues

Early in the process of investigating the social media allegations, senior district leadership engaged with leaders of the Maine Wabanaki Truth and Reconciliation Commission. While it became clear that the district's situation is significantly different and does not rise to the same level of process required for the Commission's work, it is clear that some structured dialogue between students and staff should take place as a follow-up to this process and should be built in on an ongoing basis.

3. Course Evaluations by Students

Course evaluations are a common practice in post-secondary settings. They provide just-in-time feedback to staff about the student experience in a class. While unquestionably there are issues that would need to be worked through regarding access and confidentiality, staff generally supported this idea when discussed during the investigation and debrief discussions. This idea should be explored further in an effort to allow a formal and confidential opportunity for students to provide staff with feedback.

4. Targeted Education and Training

Beyond the existing efforts discussed earlier, there are concrete steps that can be taken to address issues raised in the social media posts, through training and education for various groups in the PPS community, including but not limited to:

- Gender equity training.
- Implicit bias and micro-aggression training including toxic masculinity, white supremacy and cultural erasure.
- Professional boundaries and expectations training.
- Classroom management and discipline with a social justice frame.
- Education on nondiscrimination, harassment and other related policies/procedures.

Some of these initiatives are envisioned in the implementation of Policy ACAA. Beyond that, consideration should be given to creating these formalized training opportunities as part of onboarding new staff and increasing the repertoire of current employees.

Special attention must be given to ensuring that administrative staff are aware of and follow existing policies and procedures. There was ample evidence that administrators were informed of concerns by students and other staff and that their follow-up with students fell short of what is prescribed by policy and best practice.

IV. Conclusion

The social media allegations posted on Twitter by dozens of current and former Portland Public Schools students were a stark reminder of how far we have to go as a school district to become the institution that we strive to be. Large numbers of past and present employees were implicated; the allegations spanned a variety of claims including misogyny, sexual harassment, discrimination, favoritism, nepotism, failure to investigate, and unprofessional behavior, among others.

The claims happened in the wake of the demonstrations and social reckoning that followed the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Similar outings of grievances were reported across the country at the same time. The timing also coincided with the end of the school year in Portland and the pandemic. While these factors slowed the investigation, we were determined to see it through and provide a public accounting,

This report serves as a comprehensive review of the allegations, the subsequent investigation, the steps that have been taken, and steps that may be taken in time as we strive to become a just and equitable school system. The allegations provide evidence that the district has failed to provide accessible venues for concerns to be brought forward and that it has not always followed its own policies in investigating concerns when they were brought forward.

It is also clear that the district has historically missed opportunities to publicly close the cycle on these situations leading to a sense among staff, students and the broader community that complaints are “swept under the rug.” I expect that there may be disagreement by some with the process or conclusions resulting from the student allegations, but the primary goal of this report is to make visible that thoughtful follow-up has occurred as a result of what students shared in June 2020. It is my sincere hope that this report will serve as a path forward to becoming a better and more just institution.



Xavier Botana, Portland Public Schools Superintendent