Racial Equity Toolkit Assessment Worksheet

Title of Policy, Initiative, Program, Budget Issue:
Attendance Campaign_____
Department: Mayors Office_____
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☐Policy ☐Initiative ☒Program ☐Budget Issue

Background on this program

The Attendance Campaign was developed with the intent of increasing classroom attendance to assist in closing the achievement gap. Seattle's Roadmap to Success identifies attendance as a key indicator of successful on-time graduation.

Despite great intentions, City staff quickly found that the initial direction of the program which focused on providing incentives, was not as responsive to students of color who faced larger barriers including transportation issues, discomfort at school, lack of relevant curriculum, lack of mentors and teachers of color, lack of school support, lack of parental support and/or family obligations. It became clear that to address the longer-term issues underlying attendance, partnerships had to be built across the community to address the deeper systemic barriers impacting students of color.

Step 1. Set Outcomes.

1a. What does your department define as the most important racially equitable community outcome(s) related to the issue?

Raising academic achievement and graduation rates for students of color by improving attendance in Seattle Public Schools. The roadmap to success identifies attendance as a key indicator of successful on-time graduation. Research in Seattle and other urban districts show that chronic absenteeism, especially in the early school years, has severe detrimental effects on the ability of students to stay at grade level. The focus of the Attendance Campaign is to raise student attendance rates in Seattle Public Schools through an incentive program, school events, and community outreach intended to raise the awareness of the importance of this issue.. Our goal is to have at least 8 out of 10 students across racial groups to have fewer than 10 missed days of school per school year.

1b. Which racial equity opportunity area(s) will the issue primarily impact?

☒**Education**
☐**Community Development**
☐**Health**
☐**Environment**

☐**Criminal Justice**
☐**Jobs**
☐**Housing**

1c. Are there impacts on:
☐**Contracting Equity**
☐**Workforce Equity**

☐**Immigrant and Refugee Access to Services**
☒**Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement**

Please describe:

Step 2. Involve stakeholders. Analyze data.

2a. Are there impacts on geographic areas? ☒Yes ☐No
Check all neighborhoods that apply *(see map on p.5)*:

☒All Seattle neighborhoods
☐Ballard
☐North
☐NE
☐Central

☐Lake Union
☐Southwest
☐Southeast
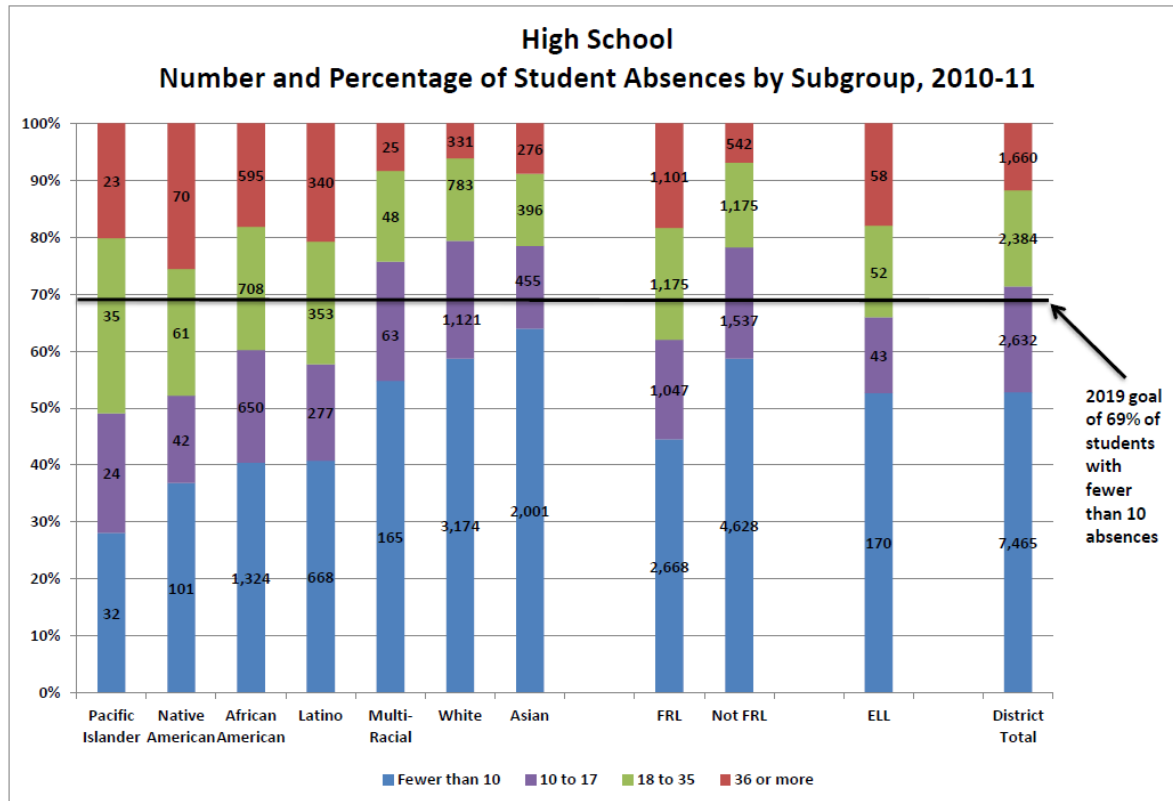☐Delridge
☐Greater Duwamish

☐East District
☐King County (outside Seattle)
☐Outside King County
  Please describe:

2b. What are the racial demographics of those living in the area or impacted by the issue?

Schools with the lowest attendance rates in the city typically serve neighborhoods with high racial diversity. On the data sheet you can see that according to Seattle Public Schools, Native American, African American, Latino students and those on Free and Reduced Lunch have lower attendance rates than white students. Additionally, even though Asian American students across Seattle have generally higher attendance rates, the data is an aggregate of all Asian students—so it is difficult to tell how specific Asian communities (such as Pacific Islander students) fare.

High School
Number and Percentage of Student Absences by Subgroup, 2010-11

2019 goal of 69% of students with fewer than 10 absences

Legend: ■ Fewer than 10 ■ 10 to 17 ■ 18 to 35 ■ 36 or more

2c. How have you involved community members and stakeholders?

The Campaign has actively pursued partnership with various community-based groups and organizations, already to some degree of success. Groups include the PTSA, YMCA, City Year, and Youth Ambassadors. Strategies include: getting community & cultural centers and libraries to advertise and support the program; ensuring translation of materials into the 9 most commonly spoken languages in SPS, encouraging community blogs, public school newspapers, and community organization newsletters to promote stories about the campaign; writing letters to businesses within ¼ mile from every Seattle Public School asking them to encourage truant students to go back to school. In addition, we have asked sponsors around the city to support the program. Up to this point, community support has been very positive. The Campaign has

encouraged the Youth Ambassadors—a group of diverse student leaders from across the city—to help with the campaign, providing them access to city resources to help them get their message out. In 2011- 2012, the Youth Ambassadors will lead attendance campaigns at 3 high schools.

2d. What does data and your conversations with stakeholders tell you about existing racial inequities that influence people's lives and should be taken into consideration?

Attendance is one of the most important factors for academic success thus this campaign can have the most impact on those students who are farthest behind academically. Many communities of color argue that Seattle Public Schools has done a poor job historically of engaging them and their children in their neighborhood schools. Successful attendance campaigns have taken into consideration how schools are perceived in different communities and how they can become more welcoming to families. Minority students also are disproportionately suspended or expelled from school, exacerbating the impact of absenteeism on their achievement.

2e. What are the root causes or factors creating these racial inequities?

Barriers to school attendance include: lack of community awareness of how important it is to miss fewer than five days a semester, lack of transportation, discomfort at school, lack of relevant curriculum, lack of mentors and teachers of color, lack of school support, lack of parental support and/or family obligations, as well as myriad other factors. Poor attendance disproportionately impacts low income students and students of color.

Step 3. Determine Benefit and/or Burden.

Given what you have learned from data and from stakeholder involvement…

3. How will the policy, initiative, program, or budget issue increase or decrease racial equity? What are potential unintended consequences? What benefits may result? Are the impacts aligned with your department's community outcomes that were defined in Step I.?

If students of color improve their school attendance while schools address some of the factors that these students and their families find unwelcoming to them, we should see a reduction in the achievement gap. During the 2011-12 school year Attendance Campaign, schools with wealthier families saw attendance improvements during months when family decided to forgo extended vacations As a result students with the greatest opportunities to travel with family received more attendance incentives.
While we are continuing to work with the district to support the policy that family vacation does not count as an excused absence, we are also adapting the campaign to better address the needs of low-income students. For example, we are working directly with the Inter-Agency program to customize the attendance campaign to meet their students' needs. In addition, we have worked with Aki Middle School and Safe Routes to Schools to improve safety and transportation to the school.

Also, different schools throughout the city found the program more and less helpful depending on the school leadership and other programs at the school.

There is the possibility that the incentive program does not help to improve attendance rates in lower-attendance schools, but does succeed in predominately-white schools. We will be watching the data carefully and adjusting as we go with the continued goal of focusing on improvement.

Step 4. Advance Opportunity or Minimize Harm.

4. How will you address the impacts (including unintended consequences) on racial equity? What strategies address immediate impacts? What strategies address root causes of inequity listed in Q.6? How will you partner with stakeholders for long-term positive change? If impacts are not aligned with desired community outcomes, how will you re-align your work?

Program Strategies? Ask Schools to opt in to ensure that the program works for them. Ask Schools what works and doesn't work for them.

Policy Strategies? _____

Partnership Strategies? Work with City Year, the Y, and Youth Ambassadors to best reach diverse schools. The Campaign is dedicated to providing prizes for classes and schools that exhibit the most improved attendance rates. By focusing on rewarding improvement—rather than rewarding schools that already show a high level of attendance—the program is providing reachable goals for schools that currently have lower-attendance. By raising attendance rates in these schools, the campaign hopes to reach traditionally underrepresented students.

Step 5. Evaluate. Raise Racial Awareness. Be Accountable.

5a. How will you evaluate and be accountable? How will you evaluate and report impacts on racial equity overtime? What is your goal and timeline for eliminating racial inequity? How will you retain stakeholder participation and ensure internal and public accountability? How will you raise awareness about racial inequity related to this issue?

While we haven't done much directly to date to educate on racial issues, the Attendance Campaign has the ability to highlight how communities of color could benefit most from improved attendance rates.

The campaign has made a conscious effort to gain incentives (such as wristbands and lanyards) by purchasing from WMBE companies. We will continue to pursue campaign-related business with companies of this type.

We get data from Seattle Public Schools and OFE on attendance rates and can compare them among different student populations. Since there is the possibility that the incentive program might not help to improve attendance rates in lower-attendance schools, but does succeed in predominately-white schools, we will be watching the data carefully and adjusting as we go with the continued goal of focusing on improvement.

Besides the Attendance Campaign, Families and Education Levy funded contracts with the Seattle Public Schools include specific measurable goals for improving student attendance. These goals are aligned with the SPS strategic plan and the Community Center for Education Results initiatives to improve student outcomes. Annual goals are set for attendance improvement through 2019.

5b. What is unresolved? What resources/partnerships do you still need to make changes?

During the first year we had trouble connecting with middle and high school students and finding incentives that worked for them.

Next year we are working with Youth Ambassadors to have students run pilot campaigns in three high schools and we hope that by having students drive the campaign they will be more able to effectively reach their peers.

Another issue we had was that it is hard for us to provide additional support to schools that need help with prize distribution, and some of the less wealthy schools needed more support. We did our best to help schools with prize distribution, and to ensure that Aki Middle School had the resources it needed for its year end ice-cream party we recruited 10 volunteers including 5 firefighters to scoop ice cream so they could get 700 kids ice cream in an hour.

Step 6. Report Back.

Share analysis and report responses from Q.9 and Q.10 with Department Leadership and Change Team Leads and members involved in Step I.