Racial Equity and Social Justice Framework

Background

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families has set several outcome goals for children, youth, and families. Overarching all of these is the goal to eliminate disparities so that race and family income are no longer predictors of well-being. The racial equity and social justice framework offers a shared approach to building systems that support each and every child, young person, and family to thrive. It includes principles, definitions, and key concepts to help us understand and address the root causes and underlying drivers of racial inequities. This is a working document and will change over time.

Our Guiding Principles

DCYF plays a key role in advancing racial equity and social justice. The following guiding principles provide a broad lens for how we should engage in our work:

- **Racially Equitable:** Advancing deep equity means recognizing and healing the wounds and injustices of oppression, and transforming people, institutions, and systems. We interrupt policies and practices that maintain structural racial inequities, racial discrimination, and bias.

- **Intersectional:** We lead equity efforts with an explicit focus on racism, while also addressing the many ways groups experience oppression and marginalization in our systems.

- **Collaborative and Inclusive:** We form and sustain authentic partnerships; listen with humility and respect; and meaningfully respond to those most impacted and closest to the pain. We recognize differences in power and identity, and do "with" instead of "for".

- **Self-Aware and Relationship-based:** We move forward individually and collectively by centering our inner work and supporting one another's well-being. We intentionally invest in relationships, especially across differences.

- **Strengths-Focused and Cultivating Leadership:** We nurture leaderful efforts by valuing every individual and community's strengths and assets. We intentionally build leadership at all levels that reflect the racial and cultural diversity of our state.

- **Proactive and Strategic/Targeted Universal Approaches:** We focus upstream on root causes; power differentials; and sustainable, high-impact solutions. Race neutral or color-blind policies have failed to address the needs of marginalized communities and have exacerbated racial disparities and disproportionality.

- **Responsive and Adaptive:** We ensure that our programs and service delivery are culturally affirming and responsive. Services are contoured to the needs of children, youth, and young adults in the context of their family and community.

- **Transparent and Accountable:** We build trust and common understanding by being transparent and accountable in our actions and processes.

Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Shared Language

Establishing shared language helps to move our conversations about race, equity, and disparities forward in more accurate, just, and productive ways.

RACE

Racial categories are socially constructed; have no biological basis; and created whiteness as one of the elements of dominant culture. Race was created to concentrate power and advantage people who are defined as white and justify dominance over non-white people. The idea of race has become embedded in our identities, institutions, and culture, and influences life opportunities, outcomes, and experiences. Racial categories change based on the political convenience of the dominant society at a given period of time.

ETHNICITY

A socially constructed grouping of people based on characteristics such as culture, tribe, history, and ancestral geographical base. It is often used interchangeably with race and/or national origin, but should be instead considered as an overlapping, rather than identical, category.

CULTURE

A set of values, beliefs, customs, norms, perceptions, and experiences shared by a group of people. An individual may identify with or belong to many different cultural groups. Culture is passed to others through communication, learning, and imitation.

RACISM

Racism is racial prejudice plus power. In the United States, it is grounded in the creation of a white dominant culture that reinforces the use of power to privilege white people while marginalizing people of color, whether intentional or not. Racism is perpetuated at multiple levels:

- **Individual:** Pre-judgment, bias, or discrimination by an individual based on race, and includes internalized racism, white people internalizing privilege and people of color internalizing oppression. Our private beliefs and biases about race and racism that are influenced by our culture.
- **Interpersonal:** When individuals express ideas or take actions that perpetuates racism.
- **Institutional:** Intentional or unintentional programs, policies, practices, and organizational culture that work to benefit white people and disadvantage people of color.
- **Systemic:** The way an entire system collectively contributes to patterns of racial inequities. This includes the health, environmental, education, justice, government, economic, financial, transportation, cultural, and political systems.
- **Structural:** The interplay and compounding effects of laws, practices, policies, programs, and institutions of multiple systems, which leads to adverse outcomes and conditions for communities of color compared to white communities. This includes the historical, cultural and social psychological aspects of our currently racialized society.

EQUITY

Equity is achieved when race and other aspects of identity cannot be used to predict how one fares, and our systems are designed and adjusted to work for everyone. It is not just the absence of discrimination, but also proactive and preventative actions to achieve and sustain fairness. Equity is distinct from equality, which refers to everyone having the same treatment without accounting for differing needs or circumstances.

BELONGING

Your well-being is considered and your ability to design and give meaning to society's structures and institutions is realized. More than tolerating and respecting differences, belonging requires that all people are welcome with membership and agency in the society. Belonging is vital to have a thriving and engaged populace, which informs distributive and restorative decision-making.

BIAS

Judgment or preference toward or against one group over another.

- **Implicit or Unconscious Bias** refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for social and/or political correctness.
- **Explicit or Conscious Bias** are biases we know we have and may use on purpose.

CULTURAL HUMILITY

Approach to respectfully engaging others with cultural identities different from your own and recognizing that no cultural perspective is superior to another. The practice of cultural humility for white people is to: acknowledge systems of oppression and involves critical self-reflection, lifelong learning and growth, a commitment to recognizing and sharing power, and a desire to work toward institutional accountability. The practice of cultural humility for people of color is to accept that the dominant culture does exist, that institutional racism is in place, to recognize one's own response to the oppression within it, to work toward dismantling it through the balanced process of calling it out and taking care of one's self.

COLOR-BLIND

A term used to describe a disregard of racial characteristics or lack of influence by racial prejudice. The concept of colorblindness is often promoted by those who dismiss the importance of race in order to proclaim the end of racism. Color-blind racial ideology is characterized by the central frames of abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism and the minimization of racism.

DISPARITY

The difference in outcomes that a group experiences based on that identity (i.e. race, class, gender, etc.).

DISPROPORTIONALITY

Exists when the representation of a group is larger (over-representation) or smaller (under-representation) than their representation in the general population.

OTHERING

Othering is a strategy to prevent everyone from truly belonging in society. It encompasses systematically expressed prejudice towards group identities including, but not limited to, religion, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (class), disability, sexual orientation, citizenship/immigration status, and skin tone. It is a common set of dynamics, processes, and structures that produces marginality and persistent inequality across differences.

INTERSECTIONALITY

A framework for acknowledging that individuals with multiple identities that have been marginalized can experience compounded oppression (such as racism, sexism, and classism); and that individuals can experience privilege in some areas and disadvantage in others. There's a danger in falsely equating different dynamics (e.g. racism and sexism), so it is important to give each dynamic distinct, specific, and sufficient attention.

PEOPLE OF COLOR

Often the preferred collective term for referring to non-white racial groups, rather than "minorities." People of color describes individuals by their own attributes, as opposed to what they are not, (e.g., non-white"). It is also important whenever possible to identify people through their own racial/ethnic group, as each has its own distinct experience and meaning and may be more appropriate.

PRIVILEGE

A set of advantages systemically conferred on a particular person or group of people. Privilege is any unearned benefit, position, power, right, or advantage one receives in society as a result of their identity. People can be disadvantaged by one identity and privileged by another.

TARGETED UNIVERSALISM

Alters the usual approach of universal strategies (policies that make no distinctions among people's status and situations, such as universal preschool) to achieve universal goals, and instead suggests we use targeted strategies to reach universal goals.

WHITE SUPREMACY

A political, economic, and cultural system in which the white race is believed to be the normal, better, smarter, and superior over all other races. This system entitles whites with overwhelming control, power, and material resources. Conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread. Both white people and people of color can perpetuate white dominant culture, resulting in the overall disenfranchisement of people of color in many aspects of society. A white supremacy mindset is perpetuated when elements of this system are not named or actively undone.

Racial Equity Theory of Change

Community stakeholders helped develop the Racial Equity Theory of Change (RETOC) for Washington State's early learning system. It includes four building blocks with actions to take to eliminate racial disparities.

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT TO ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY

IN WASHINGTON STATE'S EARLY LEARNING SYSTEM

Programs, policies, and funding decisions to implement the Early Learning Plan are well informed and prioritized in response to the experiences, perspectives, and needs of people of color

Increase community voice and influence for those furthest from opportunity

Diverse parents, professionals, and community leaders provide insight, wisdom, and expertise in serving children and families

Decision making processes genuinely engage individuals, organizations, and tribes to participate

Members of diverse communities are supported, coached, and mentored as they participate in decision making processes

Inform practice with diverse measures and diverse stories

Data is gathered and interpreted in ways that build trust and insight among diverse communities

Approaches accommodate the diverse racial, cultural, tribal, and language needs of children and the professionals who serve them

Communities of color are genuinely engaged in defining credible and relevant data and approaches

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ACTION → DIALOGUE → REFLECTION → ACTION

REFLECTION

Actions to promote change and speed progress

DIALOGUE

RACE IS ELIMINATED AS A PREDICTOR of progress and success for children ages birth to 8

Resistance that slows progress and impedes change

Make decisions that genuinely meet the requirements of communities of color

Value of, and insight about, diverse community needs are the foundation of the decisions made

Coordinated decision making is transparently and consistently inclusive of diverse communities

People of color are intentionally represented in the hiring, appointment, and election of decision makers

Design and implement systems that respond to children's diverse situations

State, tribal, and local agencies work together to support children's success

Programs are designed and refined to promote access and relevance to children's race, culture, and situation

Cultural competence and linguistic relevance are seen as hallmarks of quality

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HOW WE CAN LEAD FOR RACIAL EQUITY

1. Start conversations about why equity and opportunity matters to everyone
2. Listen, learn, and partner with communities of color to improve policies
3. Cultivate and mobilize diverse advocates to champion racial equity
4. Build relationships and invest resources that will result in lasting change

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