

RE: Partnerships and Equitable Practices Team - Women of Color Response

Underly, Jill K. DPI <Jill.Underly@dpi.wi.gov>

Mon 10/11/2021 16:13

To: Morris, Shay DPI <Meeshay.Morris@dpi.wi.gov>; Underly, Jill K. DPI <Jill.Underly@dpi.wi.gov>; Johnson, John W. DPI <John.Johnson@dpi.wi.gov>; McCarthy, Thomas G. DPI <Thomas.McCarthy@dpi.wi.gov>; Holiday, Latoya M. DPI <Latoya.Holiday@dpi.wi.gov>; Jones, Benjamin R. DPI <Benjamin.Jones@dpi.wi.gov>; Kohout, Denise E. DPI <Denise.Kohout@dpi.wi.gov>; Fath, Erin K. DPI <Erin.Fath@dpi.wi.gov>; Swetz, Abigail V. DPI <Abigail.Swetz@dpi.wi.gov>

Cc: Broach, Stacy D. DPI <Stacy.Broach@dpi.wi.gov>; Cannon, William DPI <William.Cannon@dpi.wi.gov>; Gross, Loretta DPI <Loretta.Gross@dpi.wi.gov>; Ingram, Kevin N. DPI <Kevin.Ingram@dpi.wi.gov>; Lee, Alanna R. DPI <Alanna.Lee@dpi.wi.gov>; Lovings, Tacara M. DPI <Tacara.Lovings@dpi.wi.gov>; Mirilli, Ananda D. DPI <Ananda.Mirilli@dpi.wi.gov>; Stewart, Keith DPI <Keith.Stewart@dpi.wi.gov>; Thao, Mai Choua DPI <MaiChoua.Thao@dpi.wi.gov>; Washington, Nicole M. DPI <Nicole.Washington@dpi.wi.gov>; Williams-Griffin, Bianca DPI <Bianca.Williams-Griffin@dpi.wi.gov>; Mouw, Tamara A. DPI <Tamara.Mouw@dpi.wi.gov>; Fuller, Rita K. DPI <Rita.Fuller@dpi.wi.gov>

Members of the Women of Color ERG,

Thank you for your letter outlining your concerns regarding the formation of the Partnerships and Equitable Practices (PEP) Team, and the greater issues you see about a lack of diversity in the agency's managers and use of the Equity Decision and Policy Tool.

The formation of the PEP Team was an urgent priority for me. The department needs dedicated capacity to work on and organize our equity activities and increase our engagement with underserved communities through increased partnerships. But our most critical activity is implementing our Equity and Inclusion plan to fidelity. I greatly appreciate the ideas you shared with me about the creation of an equity team when we met during the transition and after I took office - it helped to create a more transparent charge for the team's work and allowed for more explicit connections to our human resources staff. I look forward to continuing to engage with you and others across the department on ways we can continue to fine-tune the PEP Team's priorities and work. I believe the PEP team we've assembled possesses the skills, knowledge, and experience to carry this critical work forward. As such, we will be moving forward with the team and it's charge to advance equity and partnerships both within the department and in our communities across Wisconsin.

I am committed to continuing conversations about how we can advance equity and support all our employees. And I appreciate your willingness to surface your concerns with me. I know the creation of a team focused on equity has been an ask and desire of many staff over the years and the formation and work of the PEP team is of interest to many. As such, I think it best to share our exchange regarding the PEP team with our staff.

Jill

From: Morris, Shay DPI <Meeshay.Morris@dpi.wi.gov>

Sent: Thursday, October 7, 2021 9:40 PM

To: Underly, Jill K. DPI <Jill.Underly@dpi.wi.gov>; Johnson, John W. DPI <John.Johnson@dpi.wi.gov>; McCarthy, Thomas G. DPI <Thomas.McCarthy@dpi.wi.gov>; Holiday, Latoya M. DPI <Latoya.Holiday@dpi.wi.gov>; Jones, Benjamin R. DPI <Benjamin.Jones@dpi.wi.gov>; Kohout, Denise E. DPI <Denise.Kohout@dpi.wi.gov>; Fath, Erin K. DPI <Erin.Fath@dpi.wi.gov>; Swetz, Abigail V. DPI <Abigail.Swetz@dpi.wi.gov>

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Subject: Partnerships and Equitable Practices Team - Women of Color Response

Dear Cabinet,

As members of the Women of Color Employee Resource group, we are writing this letter to collectively express our disappointment in the creation of, and communication about, the Partnerships and Equitable Practices Team under the Office of the State Superintendent.

Our objections are as follows:

1. According to DPI's e-learning course, the Equity Decision & Policy Tool was designed to integrate explicit consideration of equity in decisions related to policies, practices, programs, and budgets. Once again, the agency has failed to utilize and disregard our own tool.
2. The DPI Cabinet arrived at a critical decision behind closed doors, distancing themselves from the surmountable amount of work that staff of color has done over the years to advocate and envision the birthing of a "real" equity department. The formation of this team was a hierarchical and unilateral decision made by leaders of a governmental agency that continues to erase the contributions of staff at DPI and communities of color across the state of Wisconsin. Ultimately, by doing so this action seeks to continue beliefs and actions that support white supremacy and [white supremacy culture](#) throughout the agency.
3. The DPI committees charged with promoting and overseeing equity in the agency were not consulted in the creation of this team. Although many members of the Women of Color Employee Resource Group (WOC/ERG), State Superintendent's Affirmative Action Advisory Committee (SSAAAC), Love in Action, Equity Inclusion, Monitoring and Implementation Systems (EIMIS), Equity Connect, supported and have advocated for the need of an Equity team, their expertise were institutionally removed from any discussion, collaboration or thought partnership as there were no formal or informal communication on the implementation of this team.

The speedy implementation of an important and historical team for any state agency robbed our state of a well-thought out process, that at the very least would afford our staff of color to interview and potentially, be selected to a director position. Rather, it was a decision of this body to continue to invest, support and lift the voice of our white colleagues. In contrast, this week our Governor and the Department of Health Services announced a historical hire after engaging with their staff of color and external partners in a national search to create the first [legitimate](#) Office of Health Equity.

Given the arguments above, we collectively disavow this newly formed office and respectfully request that Cabinet dismantle the team effective immediately. We are grateful for the members appointed to this team and apologize for the suffering of this reckless process.

The Women of Color ERG (WOC)'s vision includes a team led by institutionally marginalized staff; a department that encapsulates a vision of educational justice; merging the internal work of the department and the external work needed. In a state that perpetually ranks among the worst for our Black students, highlighting [extreme racial disparities](#) and a predominantly white state agency with dismal advances to recruit, hire and retain staff of color, this decision demonstrates a great level of carelessness to communities of color everywhere.

Further, we ask that Cabinet engage with multiple stakeholders in a legitimate process guided by our Equity Decision & Policy Tool to create an Educational Equity Team.

We look forward to hearing from you and engaging in meaningful conversations with Women of Color ERG.

Thank you,

Members of the Women of Color ERG

Equity Decision and Policy Tool ecourse https://media.dpi.wi.gov/fred/equity/policy-tool/story_html5.html retrieved 10/3/21

White Supremacy Culture

[WhiteSupremacyCulture.pdf](#) by Tema Okun and changeworkDR retrieved 10/3/21

White Culture Worksheet developed by M. Potapchuk, MP Associates. Transforming White Privilege: A 21st Century Leadership Capacity, ©CAPD, MP Associates, World Trust Educational Services, 2012 [WHITE CULTURE WORKSHEET \(harvard.edu\)](#) retrieved 10/3/21

White Supremacy Culture. From Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, ChangeWork, 2001 [White Supremacy Culture.pdf \(texas.gov\)](#).

[Race in the Heartland, Wisconsin's Extreme Racial Disparity](#) by Collin Gordon, October, 2009 retrieved 10/03/21

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Take care,

Shay Morris, MBA

Grants Specialist

Title I and School Support Team

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Phone: 608-264-9324

Meeshay.morris@dpi.wi.gov