

Establishing District Equity Committees for Senate Bill 732

Section 5: Empowering and Resourcing Your District Equity Committee



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The DEC brings people together to have honest conversations and to create action plans that work to dismantle current and historical inequities and continuous improvement. As a new entity, the DEC will navigate many new relationships, systems, and issues. Many of these will span across streams of work areas of the district that will need support from the superintendent and other district staff so that the DEC can carry out their mission and do their work effectively. In particular, as the DEC is meant to reflect the demographics of the communities and families that the district serves, DEC members may encounter issues and tensions related to positionality and power within the district. For small-and-rural districts where personnel is limited, perhaps consider engaging your ESD for training and support for the District Equity Committee members. Consider the training needs that will collectively best support members to work in alignment towards the district's equity goals.

Requirements

Empowering the District Equity Committee with the right tools, conditions, context, and resources is crucial for its long-term success. Section 3 of [OAR 581-022-2307](#) states that:

- **Each school district, in consultation with the District Equity Committee [*Educational Equity Advisory Committee*], is required to provide sufficient support to District Equity Committee members to participate in meetings, including, but not limited to, access to district-managed emails, translation and interpretation services, and relevant public meeting and security trainings.**

Supporting the DEC to do their best work

Beyond the requirements around what a district is required to provide for the DEC are a number of additional supports that you could offer the District Equity Committee to best serve your district. In most cases, DEC members are volunteering their time and capacity to support the district. Putting them in the best position to succeed and ensuring that their work makes a meaningful impact will help create a long-lasting District Equity Committee. Here are best practices and considerations for how you can support the DEC to do their deepest work in service to your district and community:

- Designating a district staff member to the DEC specifically for administrative, operational, and coordination support. If the DEC is unpaid, then supporting DEC members to spend their time discussing equity issues rather than engaging in administrative work will help with their time and bandwidth.
- The superintendent and district staff can support the DEC by providing context, story, and knowledge related to: district/school/community history; knowledge of operational budgets and state/federal plans; key anecdotes, vignettes and stories to help paint a picture of the district landscape; and other helpful insights that will allow the DEC to have as informed a discussion as possible. Think of this like the way in which some school boards or a site committee is staffed and supported with any inquiries.
- A meaningful practice is for the superintendent to simply be responsive to the DEC's requests and needs. Whether it is a request for follow-up, to attend certain meetings or contact specific staff, if the DEC feels like the superintendent is a cheerleader for their work and backs that with action, they will feel more empowered to do deeper work on behalf of the district.
- Allocating funding for the District Equity Committee. Supporting a DEC could be an allowable use of several grant programs (such as the Student Investment Account in the Aligning for Student Success

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Integrated Guidance) or the general fund. If funding allowed, a partial staffing of FTE could ensure the DEC has steady operational momentum that could be used to help cover: DEC gatherings/retreats (to support relationship-building and deeper strategic vision); professional development for the DEC; travel/food costs to help DEC members meet communities and families (especially in rural areas).

- Offering professional development, team-building activities, training or other opportunities to the DEC that can help them create shared equity frameworks, consciousness, and knowledge. Also making sure to attend to jargon, highly technical language, or “edu-speak” that may not be familiar for DEC members.

Supporting the DEC with Local, District Policy

SB 732 allows for a range of approaches to a District Equity Committee, including numerous recommendations such as developing an annual report to share with the district community and selecting a single DEC member to serve as an advisor to the school district board. Some districts, however, may wish to institutionalize their own local board-adopted policies and/or create resolutions that can make even more explicit the equity-driven goals that a district has for its DEC. For example, SB 732’s recommendations could be codified into local district policy.

If districts would like support with the creation or review of equity policies that can enhance the work of the DEC, they may contact the Policy Team at the [Oregon School Boards Association](#). For another key resource on equity and local district policy, see Race Forward’s [Equity Policies Toolkit for School Boards](#).

Key Connection Points

Creating conditions for the success of the District Equity Committee involves connecting the DEC with critical work in the district. Establishing touchpoints for DEC members to engage work across the district – or for district staff that aren’t on the DEC to engage in DEC work – will support the DEC to more effectively advise on important equity issues. Consider how to ensure that the DEC has as much context about the district’s ongoing equity work as possible. This could include:

- Regular briefings from the superintendent, district staff, community members, and other key equity teams in the district.
- Sharing the [Mapping Existing Equity Efforts Worksheet](#) with the DEC and creating standing agenda items in DEC meetings for presentations about other district equity work.
- Identifying what other meetings and teams DEC members can attend (either regularly or on an ad-hoc basis).

Safeguarding Transparency, Accountability and Safety

District Determinations on DEC's and Public Meeting Laws

For the District Equity Committee to do its work effectively, the district should plan for how they can account for the DEC's safety and well-being while upholding any relevant aspects of [Oregon's Public Meetings Law](#) it determines must be met.

Requirements like Public Meetings Law and responding to requests for public records are intended to support transparency and accountability. They can create greater public understanding and confidence in the DEC's work, as well as present the DEC opportunities to learn more from the public about what is occurring in the district. However, these requirements can also present challenges, tensions, and even hostility as the DEC touches on issues or dynamics in the district that could be sensitive or potentially polarizing. DEC members are volunteers and may not be trained in public relations or sensitive communications, let alone facing adversity from the public. This adversity could take the form of racial (or other identity-based) attacks/abuse, harassment, and repeat disturbances. These can cause impact and trauma for DEC members.

Consult with Legal Counsel on Local Application of Public Meetings Law

Public Meetings Law applies to any governing body of a public body. So, what is a governing body?

According to the [Department of Justice's Public Meeting Manual](#) a body that has authority to make recommendations to a public body on policy or administration is a governing body. All meetings of a governing body must be open to the public, unless Public Meetings Law permits the body to meet in executive session or otherwise provides an exception. These laws apply regardless of whether the governing body members are private citizens or not. The public meeting manual specifically provides, as an example of a public body, a "school board advisory committee consisting of private citizens who meet with and make recommendations to the board on school matters." **ODE is not able to provide legal advice on the applicability or requirements of the public meetings laws. Districts should consult with their legal counsel to determine whether the laws apply to the DEC.**

Throughout the rulemaking process, ODE heard significant discussion, questions, and concerns regarding the applicability of public meeting law to these equity committees. Given the composition and responsibilities of these committees, supporting the safety and wellbeing of members is both critical and difficult in a public meeting setting.

Districts may create meaningful designs and approaches to meeting SB 732 that meet the laws requirements, support high-quality DEC member participation, and adhere to public meeting law. ODE is not able to offer legal counsel or advice on any given design. Questions regarding how a proposed design does and doesn't interact with public meeting law needs to be addressed by local legal counsel. Districts may also review the information in the Department of Justice Public Meetings Manual and seek guidance from organizations like the Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) and the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) when considering what is allowable.

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Asking vulnerable community members to step into a space that does not account for the different ways that transparency is felt by the different types of Committee members is a significant implementation challenge. The department has partnered with both COSA and OSBA on resources for holding safe and effective meetings, and we want to make those available to folks as we move forward.

Supporting the safety and well-being of DEC members

ODE recognizes the challenging reality that community leaders stewarding work focused on educational equity have been and could be impacted by threats, harassment, or intimidation. Districts should make pragmatic assessments about how to navigate these challenges in relationship with DEC members, and in ways that keep this important work moving.

It is vital to plan for the safety and well-being of DEC members.

There are limitations to what state guidance can offer to adequately ensure the safety and well-being of DEC members. For additional guidance in this regard, school administrators will benefit from connecting with the [Coalition of Oregon School Administrators](#) (COSA). COSA can provide proactive and responsive resources related to risk management, safety planning, and providing protocols for use with students, staff, and volunteers. COSA and OSBA are resources in the scenario where DEC members may be targeted or where public records requests could be used as a harassing tactic to unwind the goals of the DEC.

COSA can be reached at support@cosa.k12.or.us

Districts are encouraged to consider:

- Creating and implementing documented working agreements between the superintendent, school board, and DEC that include clear safety plans and risk management protocols for students, staff and volunteers.
- Partnering with your local education service district (ESD) to support training and share resources within a given region.
- Providing an orientation and onboarding process and materials that set up DEC members for success. Examples of materials might include: current budget, initiatives that the district is focusing on, attendance data, discipline data, strategic plans.
- Consulting this ODE resource on [Ensuring focal student group safety and privacy](#).

ODE will listen to early implementation efforts and continue to develop tools or frameworks that can support the important community dialogues these new laws animate while also seeking solutions to complex questions about student privacy.

Assuring the responsibilities, opportunities, and obligations of SB 732 are met

Senate Bill 732 sets minimum requirements for the implementation of District Equity Committees (DEC) and is set forth in Oregon Administrative Rules, Chapter 581 under Division 22 ([OAR 581-022-2307](#)). Annually, school districts are expected to complete assurances of compliance with the minimum requirements of SB732 just as they do with all requirements under Division 22. Signed assurances are submitted to the Oregon Department of Education.

The assurance process is constructed to be a supportive model for districts. Should a district not be in compliance with the DEC Rules, the assurance process provides districts opportunities to seek Technical Assistance in support of implementation. If districts know they are not in compliance, they may take a proactive approach and inform ODE. After which, they could begin the corrective-action process. If the district continues to be out of compliance following corrective action, ODE may withhold State School Funds as a final measure of accountability. Again, this process is designed to come alongside districts in the implementation of DECs and is not constructed to be punitive in nature. For more information on Division 22, please review the [Division 22 Standards For Public Elementary and Secondary Schools](#).

As with all laws, there is the letter and the spirit. The aim of this guidance is to speak to both. A thriving education for each and every student in Oregon can be brought to life through meaningful engagement and the establishment of strong and well-supported District Equity Committees.