

Amherst Public Schools
Pelham Elementary School
Amherst-Pelham Regional School District

Social Justice Commitment

Introduction to PreK – 12 Social Justice Strands

The following tables represent a starting point for the ARPS District's implementation of its social justice commitment. Entries are recommendations, and not meant to be all-inclusive. Feedback from each school on how social justice goals are already being addressed, and input from the broader school community on omissions, suggestions, and available resources, will enrich each targeted area and make this a truly working document. Key components include the following:

Column 1: *Values and Attitudes/ Students' Readiness for Commitment to Social Justice and Equity*

The theme for this column was taken from Oxfam's Curriculum for Global Citizenship, as were some of the goals for social justice values at different ages. Information on the age-appropriate readiness levels drew from a number of sources:

- **Lawrence Kohlberg:** His work on the stages of moral development. One progresses from one stage to the next, in sequence, learning from the reasoning of those at the level just above their current level
 - Premoral / Preconventional Stages: Behavior motivated by anticipation of pleasure or pain – (under ages 10 / 11)
 - Stage 1: Punishment and obedience
 - Stage 2: Instrumental exchange
 - Conventional Morality: (begins c. ages 10-12)
 - Stage 3: Interpersonal conformity
 - Stage 4: Law and order – (dominant by age 16)
 - Transitional stage
 - Post-Conventional / Principled Morality:
 - Stage 5: Prior rights and social contract – (appears in mid-20s)
 - Stage 6: Universal ethical principles
- **Carol Gilligan:** Her work critiquing Kohlberg for studying only males; she examines moral development in females
 - 3 stages: selfish → conventional → post-conventional

- Males have a ‘justice orientation;’ a moral imperative to respect the rights of others; Kohlberg values this as a higher level than the female stage
 - Females have a ‘responsibility orientation,’ a moral imperative to care for others; this should be valued equally with the male imperative

- **Phyllis Labanowski**: Her paper on identity development and “diversity.”

- **Jean Piaget**: His work on the stages of cognitive development. Persons move from one stage to the next, in sequence.
 - Sensory-motor: Infancy & early childhood
 - Preoperational: 2 – 7 years
 - Follows dos and don’ts given by authority figures
 - Egocentric
 - Concrete operations: 7 – 11 years
 - Thinking is less egocentric
 - Can order logically
 - Can perform concrete problem-solving
 - Formal operations: 11 – 15 years
 - Capable of abstract thought
 - Can generate propositions and possible outcomes

- **Abraham Maslow**: His work on the hierarchy of needs. These needs include: physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem needs. When one level of need is taken care of, an individual can progress to the next stage, ending with the achievement of self-actualization.

- **Michael Schulman & Eva Meckler**: Their work on moral development. The belief that moral development occurs through the *ages* of childhood, as opposed to the *stage* theorists Kohlberg and Piaget. Moral training should align with development of child, including the following:
 - Birth through 5 years:
 - Teaching prosocial behavior
 - Teaching fairness
 - Ages 5 – 12:
 - Teaching children how to resolve conflicts
 - Helping children meet responsibilities
 - Recognizing group identity
 - Explaining evil to children
 - Adolescence and beyond
 - Relationships and ethical behavior
 - Rules
 - Making positive choices
 - Dealing with moral dilemmas

- **Lev Vygotsky:** His work on social development as a *process*, not definable by *stages*.
 - Development and learning depend upon social interaction
 - A child's 'zone of proximal development' includes:
 - their actual developmental level, reflecting work they can do independently
 - their level of potential development, achievable with help from another person, adult or peer

Column 2: *Teacher Actions*

This column suggests pedagogical strategies that can be used to meet the District's social justice goals and the developmental readiness level of the students. Suggested teacher actions include the incorporation of appropriate curricular content, the modeling and teaching of necessary skills, the posing of key ontological questions, the presentation of activities designed to deepen student consciousness about justice and injustice, and the provision of opportunities for students to create and participate in actions that can make a difference in the world. The list is not meant to be all-inclusive. The development of this cohort of strategies was informed by the following:

- Amherst-Pelham Schools, "*Standards of a Multicultural School System:*"
 - "*Instruction: Research-based Pedagogy*"
 - Amherst Regional Middle School 7th & 8th *Grade Social Studies Curriculum Maps*
 - Amherst Regional High School *Program of Studies*
- Banks, James, et al. "*Essential Principles for Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society.*" Seattle: Center for Multicultural Education, 2001.
- Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. *Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century: The Report of the Taskforce on Education of Young Adolescents.* 1989
- Cotton, Kathleen. "*Developing Empathy in Children and Youth.*" NW Regional Educational Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series. <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/7/cul3.html>
- Duffy, Carolyn. "*Developing Empathy,*" in *Peace Education.* U.S. Department of State English Language Programs: <http://exchnages.state.gov/forum/journal/pea8background.htm>
- The Earth Charter. www.earthcharter.org
- Pitt, Jane. "*Social Justice in Education in 'New Times.'*" Australian Association for Research in Education. 1998.

Column 3: *Examples of School Community Action*

A key component of our proposal is that our schools ensure that students move beyond an understanding of social justice and equity issues to a point of empowerment as active participants in changing their world for the better. The goal is for students to understand that they can make a difference, and to gain experience in learning how to act, both individually and collectively, to address issues of injustice, either locally or globally. The examples given are meant to be illustrative, not prescriptive. Actions should arise from a convergence of student and teacher interest/need and curricular objectives.

Column 4: Resources / Materials

Some initial resources have been noted in this column, as examples of readings, visual materials, curricular programs, and educational groups that can serve as supports and references for teachers and administrators in implementing the District's social justice commitment. We welcome suggestions from members of the broader school community for this section; and expect that the wealth of knowledge and experience available in the District will result in a rich and accessible resource list.

Column 5: Administrative Actions

This column outlines a variety of administrative actions necessary and / or important in the implementation of the District's social justice commitment. Such actions include provision of applicable professional development training for staff; attention to class issues when apportioning resources; support for and expectation of curricular incorporation of social justice themes, consciousness and issues; and the fostering of a school climate that invites thoughtful, respectful dialogue about race and other social justice issues. This list is not meant to be all-inclusive. The development of this cohort of actions was informed by:

- Amherst-Pelham Schools, "*Standards of a Multicultural School System:*"
 - "*Curriculum: A Rigorous Multicultural Curriculum*"
 - "*Institutional Practices: Institutionalized Multiculturalism*"
 - "*Instruction: Research-based Pedagogy*"
 - "*Professional Development: Comprehensive Staff Development*"
- Banks, James, et al. "*Essential Principles for Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society.*" Seattle: Center for Multicultural Education, 2001.

Column 6: Parents'/Guardians/ Role

In this column will be added suggestions generated by the parents and guardians in our school community, as to the ways in which these groups can support the District's social justice commitment. To paraphrase Lisa Delpit in Other People's Children, it is incumbent upon teachers not in a represented group to look to parents and guardians for insight regarding their children's experience and educational needs.

Column 7: Correlating ARPS "*Standards of a Multicultural School System*"

This column references the appropriate District standard matching the student goal for social justice values and attitudes, teacher action, and/or administrative action. (*document attached*)

Position Statement

The Social Justice Commitment overview is the manifestation of modeled cognitive and affective behavior in teaching by the teacher and learning by students. It is, by its very nature, a goal to create a healthier and more socially aware venue for all in the school community. When these expectations are enacted the culture of a school will change because the focus of the members of that community must shift between a focus on the individual and the community of which they are a part.

Modeling this behavior in a school setting is the responsibility of each staff member. How do we view each other? How do we treat one another, regardless of position? What are the benefits of taking on a more socially just system? When we take on these questions, we must reexamine old notions and decide on the validity of each.

Accepting the responsibilities of the social justice commitment means teachers and students will expand their perceptions to include dominant and marginal language as it pertains to how we perceive one another in school. Terms like: global competitiveness, individual access, measured competencies, market driven, development plans and accountability are dominant language terms. Marginal language terms such as: social cohesion, social capital, community, trust, reciprocity and cooperation must become a part of the socially just curriculum. Staff and students should be encouraged to analyze both the formal and informal curriculum, as to issues of equity that are embedded in each area.

To simply conclude that all of this will happen with presentations and discussions is frivolous thinking. While each of us does our best to be just and fair, it is essential that we examine methods that make our efforts uniform and repetitive as each class of students matriculates through our school system. To create this network a great deal of discussions in large and small groups is necessary!

Roger Wallace, Chair Social Justice Commitment Group