



MEMO

TO: James McGee, Principal
Elisa Schorr, Area Senior Director

FROM: Superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero

CC: Shawn Bird, Chief of Schools
Dan Jung, Chief Operating Officer

DATE: November 16, 2020

SUBJECT: Removal of Fletcher Murals at Grant High School

Because of our beliefs that the district should adopt a student-centered, racial equity and social justice focused lens in all decisions and that all students should have equitable access to enriched opportunities in school, our district reviewed the Indigenous People's Student Union (IPSU) student-led request to remove the Fletcher Murals at Grant High School. This memo describes our internal review process and outlines my decision on the matter.

Access to rich and robust arts offerings in public schools is part of an essential, whole education. Earlier this year, PPS adopted Phase I of the Master Arts Education Plan, which sets a vision for quality arts instruction, to establish what equity in and access to the arts looks like, and to identify through data what changes we need to make to ensure our system is in alignment with research and best practices. The arts are important to me as an educator because while the arts can be an expression of culture, the arts also play a critical role in providing media for dissent and resistance to oppression. The protest of the Grant murals are an example of this interplay.

RESJ Lens

In 2019, PPS adopted an updated Racial Equity and Social Justice Lens. We are committed to explicitly identifying disparities in education outcomes for the purpose of targeting areas for action, intervention and investment. We believe a committed practice of applying our RESJ lens will help us disrupt patterns of cultural and institutional racism.

A summary of the application of the PPS RESJ below led to the decisions to move forward.

1. Describe the proposed action, desired results and outcomes, and connection to PPS's Vision: A graduate of Portland Public Schools will be a compassionate, critical thinker,

able to collaborate and solve problems, and be prepared to lead a more socially just world. Surface any assumptions.

Removal of the Fletcher Murals aligns with the vision and values of PPS because a careful analysis of the negative impact on Native American students, and a student-led request for their removal, reinforces several elements of the PPS Vision:

- *Core Value - Racial Equity and Social Justice*
- *Graduate Portrait - Transformative Racial Equity Leaders, Powerful and Effective Communicators, Influential and Informed Global Leaders*
- *Educator Essentials - Racial Equity and Social Justice Centered, Inclusive and Responsive to Diverse Learners*
- *System Shifts - Racial Equity and Social Justice Centered, Transformative Curriculum and Pedagogy, A Culture of Physical and Emotional Safety*

2. How have you intentionally involved stakeholders who are also members of the communities affected by this policy, program, practice or decision?
 - a. Is there stakeholder support or opposition to the proposal? Why or Why not?

Critical to the decision were the voices of students directly impacted by the misrepresentations depicted in the Fletcher Murals: members of the Indigenous People's Student Union and their Advisor. The call for the removal was led by Native American students who were supported by several prominent members of the Native American community in Portland. Students participated in school-wide dialogue as part of their quarterly Race Forward session.

While there is broad support among students for the removal of the murals. In several communications with alumni, we were made aware that several alumni would like to see the murals either remain or be preserved.

3. How does the proposed action expand opportunities for racial equity and social justice?
 - a. Who are the demographic groups affected?
 - b. How will each group be impacted/affected by the decision or action?
 - c. Are there any potential unintended consequences for specific groups/populations? Are there strategies in place to mitigate any negative impacts?

The depictions of Native Americans in the murals reinforce a racist cultural narrative and have a negative impact on the learning experience of Native American students. Anything short of removal is complicit with the pernicious messages sent by the murals' misrepresentations. Removal provides space for a reimagined culture and climate of inclusion where students can lead change to increase positive depictions of Native Americans. However, a potential unintended consequence of removal alone could create a false expectation that removal is enough to prompt a positive and affirming experience

for Native American students. The removal of the murals must be accompanied by positive interventions that intentionally provide accurate and affirming curriculum, instruction and exposure to art.

Removal, and a plan for providing a positive and affirming learning environment and experience for Native American students, also provides benefits to every student at Grant High School. The intentional crafting of affirming experiences for students who have been negatively impacted for so long, creates long-term benefits for the school. Removal of the murals expands opportunities for racial equity and social justice by reinforcing the values of PPS.

4. Does the proposed action address barriers to equitable outcomes?
 - a. How will you track progress toward reducing disparities?

The removal of the murals addresses a significant barrier to positive student experience by removing a symbol that reinforces a racist cultural narrative from view by students, staff and community at the school.

5. What information/data are you basing your decision or action upon?

- a. What data or metrics will you collect/use to track impacts of the proposed action on the identified populations?

This decision is based upon qualitative data from the IPSU at Grant, as well as relevant research about culturally responsive pedagogy and critical race theory. Moving forward we will utilize disaggregated student performance data as well as data from the Successful Schools Survey to assess student experience and learning.

6. Describe any changes you have made or will make to the action after applying this lens.

The Fletcher murals will be removed, and school leadership, guided by student voices, will also prepare a plan for arts programming that affirms the identities of Native American/Indigenous students.

Decision

When we applied the RESJ lens to the student-led request to remove the Grant murals, a team of staff reviewed and I arrived at a set of decisions to move forward.

1. PPS Facilities will oversee the removal of the Grant Murals. The Fletcher Memorial Murals consist of two murals that flank the main stage of the Grant High School Auditorium. Each mural measures approximately 25 feet high by 20 wide. Each mural was installed in four sections and will be removed in the same sections. Due to the inherent complexity of removal, mobile lifts are not practical or sufficient, and erection of

a rigid scaffolding will be required. An engineering firm will create the design, and a specialized scaffolding company will complete the installation. Based on PPS testing, the ochre yellow used on the plaster wall surface contains lead. Lead paint identified as inherent in the mural image surface will be sealed and protected. All OSHA guidelines for safe handling of lead during construction will be followed. A six-person crew of qualified personnel composed of lead conservators, associate conservators and technical assistants will be assembled in various configurations as required by tasks. Reels with the removed mural will be housed within 8 custom wood crates for transport and storage. The work is estimated to take approximately 40 work days. The auditorium walls will be patched and receive a paint finish.

2. In alignment with the Master Arts Education plan, school leadership will work with student leaders to develop a counter narrative mural that affirms the lived experience of and culture of Native American students.
3. Staff are currently reviewing disposition and final location options for the Murals. A number of public and/or art institutions have expressed interest in the works. Staff will develop a plan for a final location in alignment with relevant policy and administrative directive.