

SPOTLIGHT ON

Saint Paul, Minnesota

Mayor Chris Coleman launched the City of Saint Paul’s racial equity work after being inspired by Valeria Silva, the city’s district superintendent of schools. Superintendent Silva brought to the Mayor’s attention that while Saint Paul was a majority white city, white students made up only 28% of the public school population in the public schools in the city. The school district had been working for a year with Pacific Educational Group when Superintendent Silva invited the Mayor and County Manager, elected officials and senior staff to attend a two-day joint racial equity training. This led to the formation of a three-jurisdiction racial equity leadership group that continues today. The Mayor, along with Ramsey County administration, committed their jurisdictions to deepen their respective racial equity efforts.

Due to the initial focus on schools, the city started bringing together departments serving youth: Parks, Library, and Police—with supporting departments including Human Resources, Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity, and the Mayor’s Office. The Mayor’s Office organized a series of “Beyond Diversity” sessions with department heads, learning about personal biases, and examining how racial equity issues play out in their current work. The city is focusing on internal operations, recognizing the impact of internal operations on racially disparate outcomes in the community.

In 2015, Mayor Coleman directed all departments to develop annual racial equity plans. Departments are focusing on their own lines of business, improving data collection and the ability to disaggregate data, and using a Racial Equity Assessment Tool to examine key policy, procedure and service decisions. Departments are also developing Racial Equity Change teams.

Mayor Coleman has set a goal that by end of his term on December 31, 2017, all 3,000 employees will have participated in foundational racial equity training. To date, 90% of 500 supervisors have been trained and the response has been positive. A new one-day foundational training was launched in late summer 2015 to all city departments and will be led by a team of trained City staff. Saint Paul Police Department will be training its staff using complementary training module that is customized for police departments. Saint Paul is employing a “train the trainer” approach so that internal expertise is built across departments.

Finally, the City’s Emerging Leaders have launched a project to develop a portfolio of tools, case studies and recommendations for deeper and more inclusive community engagement in city operations and policy-making. The six-person team is interviewing racial equity leads from other cities, as well as local community organizations, to inform their recommendations to the Mayor for ways

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to improve community participation in shaping policy and programs. The Mayor, school district, and Ramsey County have continued to collaborate publicly on issues of racial equity. The three jurisdictional leaders meet monthly on education, racial equity and youth issues, and a broader group of jurisdictional leaders meet three times annually for training and shared learning. Although each jurisdiction is at a different stage of its work and they do not always share a common language or framework, the shared learning sessions have built trust and knowledge based on a shared vision of and commitment to racial equity. This has played out in several episodes in the past year where the school district and superintendent have been challenged for their changes to disciplinary policies, mainstreaming Emotional Behavioral Disability and English Language Learner students, and realigning resources more equitably across schools. The Mayor has been a strong, public voice in support of the Superintendent, as have county staff and elected officials. The three partners have developed a strong collaboration on racial equity.

Saint Paul staff believe that a key factor in the progress the city of Saint Paul has made is due to Mayor Coleman's leadership. With a strong-mayor system of governance, Mayor Coleman has been able to make racial equity a priority and implement that priority city-wide.

To Learn More:

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Saint Paul Public Schools Office of Equity (<http://equity.spps.org/>)

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