

# Weber School District appoints new director to oversee equity, justice, inclusion

By Emily Anderson Standard-Examiner  
Jan 11, 2021



Jamie Ellis, the new equity director for the Weber School District, is pictured in her office on Friday, Jan. 8, 2021. Photo supplied, Weber School District

OGDEN — Just over one-and-a-half years after it created the position, the Weber School District has hired a new equity director.

Jamie Ellis, who was previously an assistant principal at Roy High School, was tapped to fill the position. She will oversee all equity work in the district, which means making schools inclusive and safe for students. During her nearly two-decade career in education, she has worked in positions teaching kindergarten to college-level classes, she said.

“I’ve been a part of inclusion work for a long time,” Ellis said. “I’m biracial, and that’s just part of who I’ve been growing up. For me, it really is part of who I am as an educator, just to ensure that all kids feel safe and supported and see themselves in their education.”

As a woman of Japanese descent, Ellis said her grandmother’s influence drove her to get involved in equity work. Long before her grandchildren were born, Mildred Miya spent four years living in a Japanese internment camp with her family.

Miya later became an English professor at Weber State University who “was a leader of education, diversity and inclusion,” according a March post on the Facebook page Weber State University Archives, run by the school’s library.

The impact of her family’s background, along with personal experiences, nudged Ellis into a career pursuing racial justice and inclusion. But the moments that have most prepared her for the position came in the classroom, she said.

Education is something that everyone should have access to and everyone should be able to see themselves included in,” Ellis said. “I think for me, it goes back to teaching and curriculum, and making sure that all kids feel valued and safe and thrive in a community where we create collaborative spaces.”

As former administrative intern Brenda Hart fills Ellis’ position at Roy High, she takes over for Lillian Tsosie-Jensen, who, according to her LinkedIn profile, left the school district in October.

Tsosie-Jensen did not respond to a request for comment about her departure but told the Standard-Examiner in July 2019 that it was her “dream job.”

“I really feel like all my years in education have led me to this work and led me here,” Tsosie-Jensen said. “It’s a unique opportunity that I have not seen in any of the other school districts, and I say that with a statewide vision and a national vision from previous work that I’ve done.”

The Weber School District began taking a harder look at equity issues in its schools in 2018 with the formation of the Equity, Justice and Inclusion Committee. That committee — made up of district and school administrators, as well as teachers — in 2019 recommended the district hire an individual to direct equity, justice and inclusion efforts going forward.

Ellis is the second person to take the lead on that work. As the director, she oversees the district’s Equity, Justice and Inclusion Team, which began meeting last school year. The team is comprised of educators and staff, the district’s website says. It reviews data collected by the district and sets priorities for equity work.

Over the last two years, the district has sent out surveys and formed focus groups among teachers, students and parents in an effort to establish a framework for equitable schools, which includes areas the district can improve.

“We have identified a set of standards, or goals, that really reflected the needs that existed within our school district,” said Superintendent Jeff Stephens in a Dec. 2 school board meeting, “and I love that that framework that we created is not something that came from outside.”

Among improvement areas listed on its website, the district said it hopes to collect more data on issues important to Pacific Islander students. It is also working to increase students’ understanding of how to report harassment and help students feel comfortable to do so, with an emphasis on transgender and gender nonbinary students, as well as Black students.

After reviewing this information, the Equity, Justice and Inclusion Team determined that it must focus on providing a safe learning environment for students. According to the district’s website, the Equity, Justice and Inclusion Committee is forming an action plan based on this data, which is set to be completed this academic year.

“We could bury our head in the sand and assume that these things don’t exist, but they do,” said Stephens. “And they’re our children, and our families, so we’re committed to address these.”

In her first week in the position, Ellis is working to get into her stride, she said. She has begun developing equity training for employees, and Stephens said the district is looking for ways to increase teacher diversity.

“It’s great that we have this department in our district,” Ellis said. “It’s a wonderful thing. I am honored to have been placed in this position. There’s a lot of trust that has to go with that.”

Contact reporter Emily Anderson at eanderson@standard.net. Follow her on Twitter at @emilyreanderson.



**Weber School District**  
Equity, Social Justice, and Inclusion Framework Standards

*EJIC's Purpose Statement, demonstrating leadership and passion:  
Help create a safe and inclusive climate throughout the district wherein diversity/differences are embraced and celebrated, every student and employee is inspired to achieve, thrive and grow, and where each is empowered to act against any form of intolerance, bigotry (and/or) injustice.*

<b>Standard 1: Data Review</b>
Engage in a conversation on data, policy, and practice which leads to systemic change and supports the EJIC's purpose statement*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capture more data on Pacific Islanders</li> <li>• Inclusive School Climate Surveys*</li> <li>• Data review and policy updates*</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 2: Safe Learning Environment</b>
Create a safe, caring, mutually respectful learning environment in each school where all students feel honored and valued
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide teachers with an assessment to measure their ability to increase students' sense of belonging</li> <li>• Increase educators' awareness about when they are openly making hurtful comments towards groups of students (examine micro-aggressions and unconscious bias)</li> <li>• Provide teachers with tools to help students feel more welcomed in the school/classrooms</li> <li>• Increase administrators' follow through with students who report harassment.</li> <li>• Decrease harassment in schools with a focus on heterosexism, classism, ableism, and students who are isolated due to appearance, subgroupings and non-conformity</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 3: Support Student Learning</b>
Implement initiatives that support student learning and improve academic performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase teachers' access to students' background to better relate to and be able to support them</li> <li>• Increase school's ability to check on the mental wellness of students</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 4: Effective Partnership</b>
Engage parents and key stakeholders in community efforts to increase student success and build effective partnerships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide forums for parents and students to openly dialogue and discuss issues of equity and inclusion happening in the schools</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 5: Strategic Approach to Recruitment</b>
Help other district departments adopt strategic approaches to diversity recruiting in hiring teachers, counselors and administration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt strategic approaches to increase diversity among teachers, counselors and administration</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 6: Equitable Access</b>
Ensure that all students have equitable access to diverse and inclusive education materials and experiences by implementing educational opportunities for every student, including, but not limited to, diverse curriculum, translated materials, College & Career Readiness opportunities, school-sponsored activities, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase students' understanding of how to report harassment, and increase students' comfort in reporting w/ an emphasis on Transgender/Gender Non-Binary as well as African Americans</li> <li>• Increase students' sense of belonging in their schools</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 7: Professional Development &amp; Responsibilities</b>
Engage in high quality professional development constructed on the Equity, Social Justice, and Inclusion Mission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide forums for educators to understand the purpose of openly dialoguing and discussing issues of equity and inclusion</li> <li>• Help teachers identify what resources would be helpful for them to create a stronger culture of inclusion</li> <li>• Increase educators' skills to address and incorporate inclusion/equity in their classrooms</li> <li>• Increase students' understanding of the "isms," how to dialogue about the "isms," and decrease "isms"</li> <li>• Develop a method to record and analyze the frequency, pervasiveness, and severity of identity-based harassment occurring in schools and via students' social media feeds</li> </ul>
<b>Standard 8: Student achieve, thrive and grow</b>
Help create a safe and inclusive climate wherein diversity/differences are embraced and celebrated, every student and employee is inspired to achieve, thrive and grow
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase students' understanding of the "isms," how to dialogue about the "isms," and decrease "isms"</li> <li>• Increase students' ability to relate to people that are different than themselves</li> <li>• Increase candid conversations about current events and how they affect student relations</li> </ul>

All Standards are built on EJIC goals, with the indicators taken from stakeholders' survey, except for those specified by\*

[Image supplied]