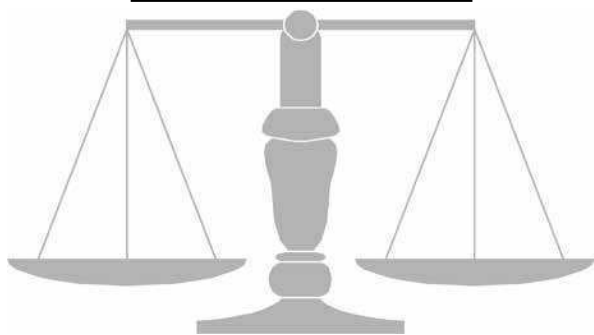


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county's equity director. It was in this capacity, he says, that he began to more closely examine the racial disparities in Portland's educational systems.

"There continued to be a gap between the educational outcomes of African Americans and white students," said Poe. "I really wanted to see that change."

Poe successfully ran for a position on the Portland School Board, and served as a board member from 2002 through 2005. He says that his knowledge of the achievement gap between white students and students of color motivated his campaign.

"We had to come to the district and demand that they pay attention to the gap," Poe said. "There were a number of schools, primarily where African Americans were

attending, that required immediate attention and resources."

Following his tenure on the school board, Poe was brought on as a staff member at the district. Since 2009, he has worked as the Chief Equity and Diversity Officer for PPS. He developed the Racial Equity Plan, which he says was one of the first educational equity plans to specifically target racial disparities in the nation.

He says that there have been measurable improvements in Portland's educational achievement gap since the plan was approved in 2010. Among other things, the plan's implementation has reduced the disproportionate expulsion rates of students of color and boosted the graduation rates at schools with higher minority populations.

Poe says that addressing the district's culture is essential to tackling the racial achievement gap. "Part of the problem at PPS is that in spite of our rhetoric we don't truly believe, across the board, that our kids can achieve," Poe said.

Initiatives like the Courageous Conversation program have helped to inspire occasionally uncomfortable conversations among educators and students, however, that are challenging teachers to reevaluate the role that race may

play in their own unconscious biases.

Following his retirement, Poe says that he has confidence that the district will continue moving in the right direction. He adds that community pressure on the district will continue to improve learning conditions and academic outcomes for students of color. "We've said as a community that we want to see the achievement gap addressed," said Poe. "I have to believe that the community won't tolerate the district walking away from that."

Despite his retirement, Poe plans to continue fighting for educational equity in his capacity as a community leader. "I've been doing this professionally for 40 years," Poe said. "I have grandchildren in this district. I'm going to stay involved, because this is my passion."

Poe says that the community should recognize the problems facing the district, and continue to encourage it to seek out long-term solutions to racial disparities in Portland's classrooms.

"There's a lot of work to be done, but we've done some good work," he said. "We've got to be willing to criticize the district for its shortcomings, but we also have to be willing to acknowledge where we're making gains."

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