

now
daily!

PortlandInsight

[Front Page](#)[Metro News](#)[Opinion](#)[Entertainment](#)[Sports](#)[Sustainable](#)[Classifieds](#)[Contact Us](#)

YOUR TOWN. YOUR PAPER.

Subscribe or
Renew Today!

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS

Download for **FREE**
the **FULL EDITION** of
the **PORTLAND TRIBUNE**
in your iPad/iPhone
or Android phone.PUBLIC
NOTICES

Get more business news:

DJC
DAILY JOURNAL OF COMMERCEAlso visit our other
**Community
Papers**
[Beaverton Valley Times](#)
[Boom! boomers & beyond](#)
[Clackamas Review](#)
[Estacada News](#)
[News Times](#)
[The Outlook Online](#)
[Lake Oswego Review](#)
[Oregon City News](#)
[Regal Courier](#)
[Sandy Post](#)
Download for **FREE**
the **FULL EDITION** of
the **PORTLAND TRIBUNE**
in your iPad/iPhone
or Android phone.PUBLIC
NOTICES

Get more business news:

DJC
DAILY JOURNAL OF COMMERCEAlso visit our other
**Community
Papers**
[Beaverton Valley Times](#)
[Boom! boomers & beyond](#)
[Clackamas Review](#)
[Estacada News](#)
[News Times](#)
[The Outlook Online](#)
[Lake Oswego Review](#)
[Oregon City News](#)

Google™ Custom Search

Search ×

[Printer-friendly version](#) [Email story link](#)

GUEST OPINION

‘White privilege’ blinds us to changes*My View • Portland schools are on right track to fight discrimination*

BY JEAN HALLEY AND AMY ESHLEMAN

Feb 2, 2012

As educators dedicated to challenging students and colleagues to think critically about race, especially about white privilege, we were heartened to read Jennifer Anderson’s “No longer colorblind” (Jan. 19).

Portland Public Schools is taking action to challenge teachers to evaluate white privilege and the importance of race in the classroom. The initiative focuses on training faculty, staff and administrators to effect change in the culture of schools. The goal is to close the racial achievement gap.

In our recent book analyzing white privilege and race in the United States, “Seeing White: An Introduction to White Privilege and Race,” we dedicated a chapter to race in the classroom. Anderson’s article captures our concerns about the racial achievement gap and the misunderstandings that can occur when teachers have not critically examined race.

Portland’s schools are investing strongly in raising awareness of white privilege and creating systems of support for all students, giving us hope regarding what might be accomplished when educators confront racism.

A major goal of our work has been to raise awareness that racism is harmful even when individuals in power intend no harm. In schools, teachers, staff and administrators may unintentionally enact racism, harming the potential success of students of color.

While blatant racism among educators is unusual, racism remains a powerful force in the United States. Subtle, often unintentional acts of racism are common among whites — including many educators — when they have not critically analyzed racism and privilege. For example, a white teacher may interpret students’ behavior based on common racial stereotypes, perceiving failure on an exam by a white student differently than a similar performance by an African-American or Latina student.

Systemic racism can be propagated through policies that claim to be colorblind while actually privileging whites. As an example, anthropologist Annegret Staiger reported in 2004 that white students were more likely than equally qualified students of color to be identified for gifted and talented programs. While the policy in place was written with a goal of being fair, failure to address race in the policy made it more likely that white students would benefit from an enhanced program than would talented students of color.

To be considered for this supposedly colorblind program, families had to request that a child be tested for giftedness. White privilege increased white families’ awareness of giftedness programs and their trust regarding equitable treatment within the school system.

Portland’s schools are addressing both unintentional and systemic racism in their efforts to change the culture of schools. Teachers, staff and administrators — white and of color — are examining race in a way that directly challenges unconscious racism. Rather than a colorblind system that inadvertently reinforces white privilege, the system in Portland public schools is becoming one of intentionally addressing race. We applaud the goal of eliminating the racial achievement gap.

We anticipate that Portland schools will face resistance from individuals who have traditionally benefited from the white privilege that has thrived within colorblind systems. In her groundbreaking work, Peggy McIntosh showed that white privilege includes advantages that are based on whites being able to assume that they will benefit at the expense of people of color.

For example, Anderson’s report that Portland Public Schools has been hiring a greater number of administrators and teachers of color may be perceived as unfair based on unexamined beliefs of white privilege. Spellman College President Beverly Daniel Tatum has noted that feelings of white privilege lead whites to assume that they have rights to the positions over individuals of color.

We agree with Portland district’s Chief Equity Officer Lorenzo Poe when he notes that cultural transformation in the schools will take time. We look forward to watching the long-term success of these initiatives.

Jean Halley and Amy Eshleman are associate professors of sociology and psychology at Wagner College on New York’s Staten Island. They are co-authors of “Seeing White: An Introduction to White Privilege and Race,” with Ramya Mahadevan Vijaya.



CHRISTOPHER ONSTOTT / PORTLAND TRIBUNE
Open Meadow Middle School students Geneva and Chris (right) work on an exercise during class. The PPS equity training teaches staff to treat students as individuals, and be culturally responsive to their backgrounds and experiences.

[Click Here to Listen Live!](#)[Click Here to Listen Live!](#)[Click Here to Listen Live!](#)