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# CREATING AN ANTIRACIST TEACHER WORKFORCE:
## POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

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# Introduction

Nationwide protests in response to racialized police brutality in conjunction with glaring racial health disparities in the COVID-19 pandemic have led to more intense conversations about racial inequities in education. Hoping to create more antiracist learning environments and asset-based strategies, many school districts are seeking policies and practices that will ensure students have access to teachers who utilize culturally responsive teaching practices and are "antiracist" in their approach to education.

This investment, *Antiracist Teacher Preparation Initiative (ATPI)*, was developed in response to the significant need to be more responsive to schools who seek promising policies and practices for developing a diverse and antiracist teacher workforce.  The ATPI began as a partnership between the American University School of Education and the Antiracist Research and Policy Center (ARPC) to advocate for education policies and practices that build (1) more inclusive learning environments through research, community outreach and policy-advocacy; and, (2) a more culturally competent and antiracist teacher workforce for America's increasingly diverse public-school student population. This planning and early-stage execution grant funded research, dialogue and broader sector engagement at the intersection of education, equity and antiracist practice across a set of core activities, including the development of an Antiracist Teacher Professional Development Curriculum. Due to the COVID pandemic, the proposed national teacher summits were not held as planned.  Instead, policy conversations with experts were held at a virtual Summer Institute on Education Equity and Justice (SIEEJ).

# What is Antiracist Education?

Antiracism, as a construct, is not new. Dr. Angela Davis, a noted Black activist and feminist, stated years ago that in a "racist society, it is not enough to be not racist, we must be antiracist."  More recently, Dr. Ibram X. Kendi (2019), an antiracist scholar, has emphasized the need to examine and change policies and practices that perpetuate racialized outcomes, such as the disproportionate number of Black and Brown students who are suspended, expelled and "pushed out" of school.  In schools, the notion of antiracist education also requires attention to policy and practice change.  Darling-Hammond (2017) outlined four key steps to developing an equitable system through an antiracist lens:  a) correcting unequal resource distribution b) provide equal opportunity for 21st century learning, c) develop students' socio-emotional and academic skills, and d) support personalization and relationship building with teachers.  These steps illustrate a top-down structural analysis of education, whereby teachers play a role at each level.

As an equity-focused praxis, antiracist teaching and pedagogy share similar goals to other popular teaching strategies such as culturally responsive teaching and abolitionist teaching.  However, there are key distinctions. Antiracist pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching differ in their emphasis on structures and individuals. Culturally responsive teaching highlights individuals, groups and/or community differences as strengths that educators leverage for increasing equity and diversity in schools (Gay, 2013). Antiracist pedagogy, however, focuses on deconstructing racist systems in education through critical engagement with course materials, policies and reflexive praxis (Ohito, 2021). The politicization of instruction and discomforting privilege are inherent characteristics of antiracist teaching (Breny, 2020; Galloway et al., 2019).  As such, antiracist pedagogy works to dislodge white supremacy through overt practices of resistance to racism, whereas culturally responsive teaching attempts to undermine racist structures through celebration.

# Policy and Practice Recommendations

The need for diverse, antiracist teachers and educators is well-documented. The means to addressing this need is less known.  The authors sought out scholars in antiracist education, policy, and research for their insight and feedback on the following items: education policies that perpetuate racist practices in classrooms, b) distinct skills, knowledge, and competencies that teachers must gain to be antiracist, and c) policies that will assist in building an antiracist and diverse teacher workforce.

The following important policy and practice recommendations evolved.

- Create state and local policies that increase diversity of teacher workforce, including "grow your own" programs beginning in high schools as dual enrollment opportunities.

- Improve the work conditions of teachers-- including mental health/wellness, autonomy to practice antiracist strategies in the classroom, increase teacher salaries to attract a wider diversity of teachers.

- Remove standardized testing and other policies that create barriers to entering the workforce (e.g., Praxis Exam).

- Create policies that incentivize the development of antiracist teacher preparation programs on university campuses, e.g., funding or recognition for teacher preparation programs that show promise in graduating diverse and antiracist teachers.  Programs should include coursework in African American studies, Latino/Hispanic studies, sociology, cultural studies, women's studies and other curricula related to racism, colonialism, etc.

- Integrate antiracist practices in teacher training accreditation and state requirements, including policy change required for state teaching credentials.

- Require antiracist teacher professional development for existing teachers, including  certification or badging.

- Rigorously evaluate teacher professional development focused on antiracist and culturally responsive teaching strategies. Replicate professional development that is effective.

An antiracist teacher professional development curriculum was designed by the authors to provide teachers with the skills, knowledge, and resources to reflect on their racialized biases and practices, along with pedagogical tools to advocate for students of color through curriculum management and educational policy analysis. The curriculum, consisting of nine lessons/sessions, enables teachers to sustain a critical reflexive praxis of antiracist teaching through interactions with students and advocacy for antiracist education policy adoption. Drawing on Darling- Hammond et al.'s (2017) recommendations for effective professional development, the curriculum includes opportunities and activities where teachers can engage in active learning, share ideas, and collaborate in their learning. Each session begins with guiding questions that serve as a framing for the goals, objectives and intended learning outcomes of each session. Below is a brief description of the curriculum.

### Session 1 – Building an Antiracist Praxis

The guiding question for session one asks: *What is antiracism and how can I develop the knowledges, literacies, and capacities that will support my development as an antiracist teacher?* In order to address this question, session one introduces antiracism as an epistemology, advocacy practice, and educational policy tool. Participants gain a shared understanding of concepts related to race, racism, and antiracism that are used through the remainder of the curriculum. The goal of this session is to provide a common language around terms and set community norms and expectations that will be used across sessions and can be implemented in teachers' classrooms.

### Session 2 - Interrogating Positionality

The guiding questions for session two ask: *How does who I am, as racial being, influence what I believe, value, and assume when it comes to students of color? How does my racial identity impact my ways of teaching, learning, and engaging with my students?* In order to address these questions, session two moves teachers towards examining their positionalities and who they are as a racial being. This critical self-reflection encourages teachers to evaluate their backgrounds and belief systems, and how that influences their interactions with students of color. The goal of this session is to build the understanding that antiracist teaching requires teachers to constantly consider their own racialized identities and biases, particularly when making decisions in the classroom.

### Session 3 – Stereotypes in Society and Education

The guiding questions for session three ask: *What does our society/culture communicate to us about students of color?* How does this impact the way that we see students of color? In order to address these questions, session three provides teachers with collaborative opportunities to surface, examine, and decode stereotypes, racist language, and racist constructions to consider how these contribute to classroom and school-based racial oppression. The goal of this session is to help teachers begin to identify common stereotypes and tropes about students of color and recognize that they have intellectual capacities and gifts that counter dominant narratives about their abilities and intelligence.

### Session 4 - History of Racism in Education

The guiding questions for session four ask: *How does the United States educational system perpetuate racism in society? What are the histories of erasure, violence, and exclusion related to academic subject fields? In what ways can we resist using an antiracist framework of praxis?* In order to address these questions, session four provides an overview of the history and development of race and education in the United States. Specifically, teachers gain a shared understanding of the experiences of African Americans, First Nation people, Latinx groups, and Asian Americans. The goal of this session is to identify the ways these groups have experienced racism in schools, and the agentic ways they have resisted and built their own educational institutions, practices, and ways of knowing.

## Session 5 - Antiracist Teaching Skills

The guiding questions for session five ask: *How will I address racism at multiple levels in order to ensure that the interpersonal needs of students are met? How will I apply the knowledges and skill-sets that I have acquired during the previous sessions to develop antiracist teaching practices?* In order to address these questions, session five provides teachers with the skills and understandings to address that the interpersonal needs of students through an antiracist lens. Participants are introduced to concepts such as Funds of Knowledge (Moll et al., 2001), Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), and Culturally Responsive Teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) The goal of this session is to develop teachers' training in a variety of equity-minded pedagogies that support students of color.

## Session 6 - Antiracist Advocacy in Discourse, Curriculum, and Policy

The guiding questions for session six ask: *How can I implement an antiracist practice in my day-to-day interactions with students and colleagues? What are the best antiracist resources and curriculum adjustments I can make to bolster the learning experience for students of color? How can I resist racist policy mandates and support antiracist educational initiatives?* In order to address these questions, session six primarily focuses on how curriculum and policies shape classrooms. Teachers are provided with analytic tools to deconstruct syllabi and introduced to frameworks such as Critical Race Theory (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004) and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) to analyze school and district policy. The goal of this session is for teachers to critically evaluate educational policies to identify racist language and outcomes and develop amendments or new policies to achieve antiracist goals.

## Session 7 - Community-based Praxis and Policy

The guiding questions for session seven ask: *How will I prioritize community engagement in order to center the needs of communities of color as a way to dislodge white supremacy and flatten social hierarchies and barriers in educational spaces? How will I foreground social justice organizing, parents, and community involvement alongside teaching?* In order to address these questions, session seven introduces the concept of community-based praxis as way to transform classrooms, schools, and education broadly. Teachers workshop alongside community organizers and parents to advocate for antiracist educational policy and practices. The goal of this session is for teachers to build relationships and networks that embrace community-led efforts related race and education.

## Session 8 - Sustaining Antiracist Praxis

The guiding questions for session eight ask: *How do I maintain an antiracist praxis overtime? What kinds of resistance should I expect from students, colleagues, and administrators? How do I deal with their resistance, and perhaps even my own, when it comes to continuously learning and unlearning racism?* In order to address these questions, session eight trains teachers to use antiracist approaches when encountering resistance from students, families, and colleagues. Specifically, teachers are provided with strategies from Pieterse (2009) for handling resistance and evaluate several case studies of racist occurrences in schools. The goal of this session is to prepare teachers with multiple plans of action, in various situations, when encountering racist events that may be common or unexpected.

## Session 9 – Antiracist Leadership

The guiding questions for session nine ask: *What skills will I need to develop in order to train my peers and colleagues in antiracist practices? As an antiracist leader how will I conduct trainings that meet the needs of my specific school community*? In order to address these questions, the ninth and final session of ATPI trains teachers to become localized experts and leaders in antiracist praxis. The goal of this session is for participants to leave this final session with a set of skills tailored to training their peers and colleagues at their respective schools. Specifically, these leaders gain a thorough understanding of the curriculum's essential content, exercises, and goals in order to conduct trainings specific to each school's context.

# Evaluation of the Antiracist Teacher Professional Development Curriculum

In collaboration with District Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), the authors selected five 6th - 12th grade teachers to participate in an expert review. The purpose of the expert panel was to assess the appropriateness of the session activities, the sequencing of the sessions, and the participants' overall satisfaction with the curriculum. Teachers completed a short survey at the end of each session and participated in a 60-minute focus group on the last day. The teachers were selected based on their background experiences with diversity/equity and antiracist training and eagerness to participate. Below are the focus group themes and findings:

## Theme 1: Who is Ready for Antiracist Teacher Professional Development?

Participants shared that they thought the curriculum would be appropriate for teachers with varying levels of experience implementing antiracist teaching and pedagogy. Instead of focusing on one's experience and knowledge, participants shared that readiness for antiracist teaching and desire to learn were more important. All participants agreed that the professional development curriculum would only be helpful to those who are ready to be challenged and to engage in difficult self-evaluation.

> *"I definitely think we need to stop assuming people are ready for the training. And also address how do you, if this is something that you're going to mass produce and present to like a school district and the school district is going to say everyone has to do this. Then you're also going to have to deal with what happens when you get people in a room who are not ready for the training and very resistant to the training." (Teacher 1)*

Participants were concerned that if the professional development was required by school districts, some teachers who did not want to learn about antiracist pedagogy would participate at the cost of creating a negative learning environment. One participant was particularly concerned that such an environment would be hostile and traumatizing for teachers of color.

> *"If I'm a teacher and I'm sitting in a room and my peer who I already have some trepidation about then says something because they were resistant to this training, then now the community environment has been damaged in a sense…traumas are brought out and what traumas will linger when you've [professional development facilitator] kind of packed up and left. And we still now all have to work together and things have boiled to the surface that haven't been addressed." (Teacher 2)*

The effectiveness of this antiracist teacher professional development appears to depend on the extent to which teachers are ready for and have a desire for antiracist teaching. More importantly, requiring teachers with varying levels of readiness and openness to participate in the professional development training can have unintended negative consequences for teachers of color.

# Theme 2: Antiracist Teaching is a Long-Term Commitment

Although all participants shared that the professional development curriculum was useful and engaging, they cautioned against the notion that teachers would automatically become "antiracist" upon completing the curriculum. Participants discussed the long journey to becoming an antiracist teacher. To become an antiracist teacher, participants shared that teachers would need to unlearn racist and oppressive mindsets and attitudes, engage in self-interrogation and critical reflection, learn antiracist mindsets, and change classroom practices.

> *"We're talking about these huge concepts that we want to be fixed, but we're talking hundreds and hundreds of years of a system. It's not going to change in a summer or a few weeks." (Teacher 3)*

Since changing mindsets and attitudes can take a long time, participants talked about the importance of sharing concrete practices and strategies to meet the immediate needs of teachers. As one participant shared, "quick strategies for teachers to be able to implement tomorrow or reflective tools for a teacher to be able to act immediately, it gives them some space, the space for interrogation that then could turn into, then becoming an antiracist or an abolitionist teacher". Some participants shared that it would have been helpful to have time during the training to link and apply concepts learned to their actual practices. For example, one participant suggested exercises such as lesson plan review to translate the knowledge into practice.

The journey to becoming an antiracist teacher is long and complex. Teachers will need ongoing training and support. While unlearning mindsets and changing attitudes will likely require longer-term commitment, professional development training can still make a difference by sharing concrete and practical strategies to help teachers to make changes to their classroom practices and interactions with students and families.

# Theme 3:  Learning is Interactive and Social

Overall participants were satisfied with the content. They thought the materials covered were comprehensive and were appropriate for teachers with varying levels of expertise in antiracist teaching. They recommended a few changes to the format and delivery of the curriculum. Although they found the lectures provided important information, they shared that interactive activities such as small group discussion, video, and Jamboard would make the learning more engaging. Participants shared that they learned a great deal from their fellow teachers.

> *"What I really took from this group is listening to what other people were doing in their classrooms, how other people were approaching things. And that really is what I took was most impactful for me, was to hear those ideas, to hear those approaches and then to be open to thinking about how I might shift my thinking and my approaches based on what I heard." (Teacher 2)*

In addition, participants discussed the possibility of creating learning communities with different cohorts of teachers. Given the complexity of the materials, two participants shared the idea of creating two versions of the curriculum. One would be designed for teachers with little experience with antiracist teaching and one would be for teachers with higher levels of expertise. The curriculum would cover the same topics but would vary in terms of depth and breadth. One participant suggested hosting both versions at the same time and the two cohorts of teachers would meet at the end of each session to share lessons learned.

> *"Somebody new can learn about something new [from] somebody who is at an advanced level, and might inspire those that are really starting to learn." (Teacher 1)*

> *"Shifting what you're doing with [different versions], so that those of us who have been sort of investing in this get a chance to read more, something that's deeper or has more data attached to it, but we can still come together as a community to talk about our school buildings with the new knowledge, I think it's helpful." (Teacher 4)*

In addition to participating in a focus group, participants completed a short survey after each session and at the end of each day. The response rate was 100% for all the surveys. Due to the small sample size, we are reporting frequency to describe the findings.

For each session, participants were either very satisfied or satisfied with the content (Figure 1). There were slightly more variations in satisfaction with delivery of content (Figure 2). For five out of the eight sessions, participants were mostly very satisfied or satisfied. One participant was dissatisfied with the delivery of session 3 and session 5. One participant was neither satisfied or dissatisfied with the delivery of session 5. Participants had the most varied levels of satisfaction for session 5.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**
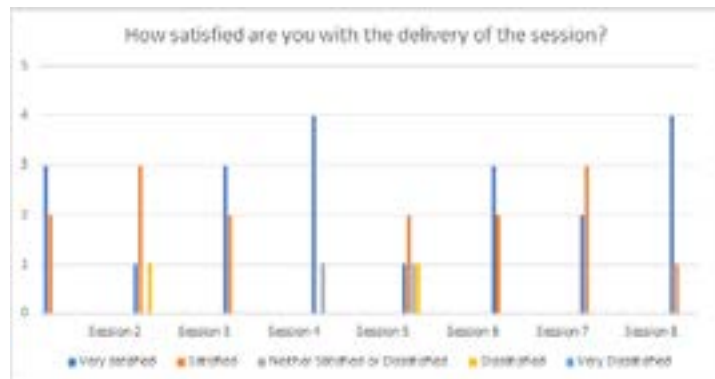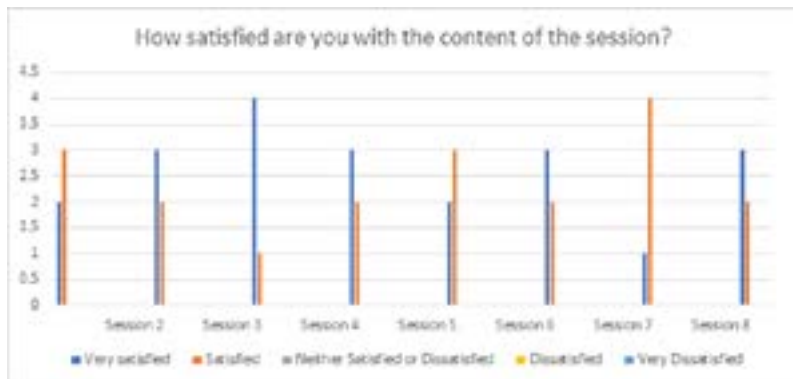


We also asked participants to report the perceived usefulness of the content. For five of the eight sessions, participants reported that the content was either very useful or useful for their classroom teaching. For the remaining three sessions, one participant reported that content was neither useful nor not useful. No participant reported the content of any sessions as not useful.

**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**
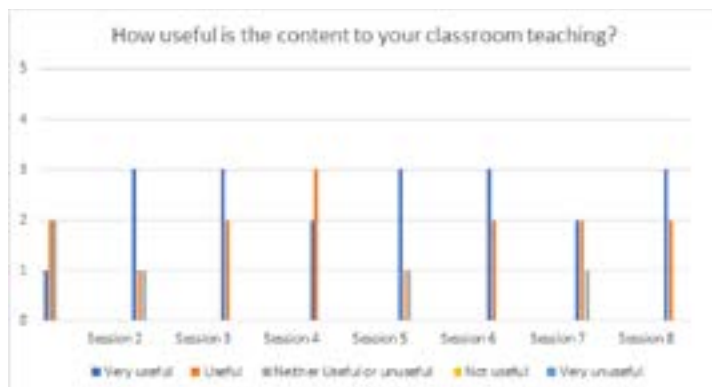
When asked how likely they would use the learning in their classroom teaching, participants said they would be very likely or likely to apply the learning in their teaching. One participant reported neither likely or unlikely to use the materials learned from sessions 1 and 2. Sessions 1 and 2 were also rated as neither useful nor not useful by one participant. These two sessions mostly covered the definitions of concepts related to race, racism, and antiracism.

**Figure 5**



Finally, we asked participants to report how much the lessons add to their ability to deliver materials. Sessions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 received a rating of "a great deal" from two participants. One participant said that session 3, 4, 5, and 6 added a lot to their ability to deliver antiracist materials. Two participants reported that session 3, 4, 7, & 8 added a moderate amount to their ability. Only sessions 1 & 2 received a rating of "not at all".

Overall, participants were satisfied with the content and the delivery of the content. In comparison, more participants reported being satisfied with the content than with the delivery. Of the eight sessions, sessions 2 and 5 received the least satisfactory ratings. Three participants and one participant thought session 2 and session 5 were too short respectively. One participant thought session 5 was too long. In general, participants reported that the content of the curriculum was useful and they were very likely or likely to use the materials in their classroom teaching. However, participants did not report high levels of confidence that the curriculum added to their ability to deliver antiracist materials.

# Expert Panel Conclusions

Results from the quantitative surveys suggest that participants were mostly satisfied with the content covered by the curriculum. When asked if anything was missing from the curriculum during the focus group, participants shared that they thought the curriculum was thorough and covered the topics that they thought were critical. Quantitative and qualitative findings highlight the participants' desire for changes in the ways the curriculum was delivered. More specifically, participants suggested more interactive activities in addition to lecture-style sessions. Furthermore, participants shared the importance of peer learning and the desire for more opportunities to learn from their fellow teachers.

Although participants were mostly satisfied with the content, there were more variations in how much they thought the curriculum positively influenced their actual teaching practices. During the focus group, participants discussed the importance of translating knowledge gained into actual classroom practices and strategies. Putting the two findings together, it is likely that participants felt that they had learned important concepts but they did not have a chance to learn how to apply those concepts in their teaching more thoroughly.

Participants believed in the importance of antiracist teaching and thought the curriculum could be helpful to teachers. However, they cautioned against including teachers who were not ready to thoughtfully engage with the content. If school districts require all teachers to participate, facilitators need to pay close attention to the learning environment and be ready to address negative or even racist comments and feedback from teachers who are not ready to participate. As participants shared during the focus group, becoming an antiracist teacher takes a great deal of effort and time. It is likely that additional sessions or additional curriculum will be needed after teachers complete the current training.

# Conclusions and Next Steps

The information and data gathered as part of the *Antiracist Teacher Preparation Initiative* reveal distinct policy and practice recommendations for enhancing the recruitment, preparation, and retention of culturally responsive and antiracist teachers. Policy changes such as requiring antiracist teacher professional development as part of state certification and incentivizing antiracist accreditation standards are just a few of the recommendations offered by experts and teachers who participated in this Initiative.

This report also described an antiracist teacher professional development curriculum. Teachers who participated in the first review of the curriculum offered insightful feedback on the benefits and pitfalls of providing antiracist teacher professional development. Overall, participants commented that antiracist teacher training is needed, but it takes a great deal of time and courage. Some commented that if school districts require all teachers to participate, facilitators need to pay close attention to the learning environment and be ready to address negative or even racist comments and feedback from teachers who are not ready to participate.

**The Antiracist Teacher Preparation Initiative workgroup (authors) intend to continue this work in the following ways:**

- Rigorously examine the effectiveness and impact of the teacher professional development curriculum in this report, including samples of teachers at various levels of experience and backgrounds. Use student and teacher outcomes as determinants of professional development effectiveness.

- Utilizing the curriculum in this report, the ATPI team will create, launch, and evaluate online, asynchronous K-12 and higher education antiracist education modules for teachers, counselors, administrators, etc. Completion of the modules will lead to a certificate in antiracist education.

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# Contributors

*"Antiracist pedigogy is building ideologies, literacies and capacities that will support the development of a critical framework for recognizing and counteracting racist constructions of reality as they affect individuals as well as institutions."*
*-- Dr. Traci Dennis*

**Traci Dennis**, Sr. Professorial Lecturer, American University.  In her current role, Dr. Dennis teaches in the undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs at American University. As a scholar of anti-Black racism and antiracist teaching, her teaching and scholarship supports the development of teacher candidates' antiracist knowledge and helps them translate antiracist theories into practice in PK-12 schools, classrooms and curriculum. Dr. Dennis served as acting director of the Frederick Douglass Academy Elementary School in Los Angeles, and as manager of curriculum and professional development for the District of Columbia Public Schools in Washington,

**Joshua Schuschke,** Assistant Professor, Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Schuschke received his Ph.D. in Urban Education Policy at the University of Southern California. His research examines the role of popular social media as educational technology tools and spaces for Black academic identity constructions. His work also leverages the cultural strengths and practices of Black youth and communities with media and technologies to advocate for inclusive pedagogical practices.

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**Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy**, Dean and Professor, American University. Dean Holcomb-McCoy is an American Counseling Association (ACA) Fellow with 30 years of experience as a kindergarten teacher, school counselor, family therapist, counseling researcher, and university administrator. She is the developer of the Multicultural Counseling Competence and Training Survey (MCCTS) and the School Counselor Multicultural Self-Efficacy Scale (SCMES). Her upcoming books, "Antiracist Counseling in Schools and Communities" and "School Counseling to Close Opportunity Gaps" will be launched in Winter 2022.