

Race Matters Committee Meeting 1.20.21

The second meeting of the Race Matters Committee happened to fall on the day of the presidential inauguration. Facilitator Natalie McCabe Zwerger, of NYU's Metro Center for Equity and the Transformation of Schools, began the meeting by asking the group if they thought the work they are undertaking is more important now than when they first met in December? She re-emphasized that the Committee is still in its initial warm-up phase, building community together, but that ultimately they would be making decisions about actionable steps.

Committee members broke into small groups to discuss this opening question -- "Has the work of the Committee shifted or is it different than prior to January 6?"

Committee members shared that this kind of work is more important now than ever before as the riots on our Nation's Capitol made the issues of white privilege clearly prominent. The general feeling was that if the demonstrators had been people of color, it would have been a totally different scenario. A BIPOC member asked "Do the police find black protesters more dangerous than a white mob trying to break into and loot a national government building? The Committee felt that these issues have been repressed for too long, and that people become complacent and feel nothing can be done. They asked, "How can our Committee's work and suggested changes make a bigger impact in the larger community and society?"

Natalie then introduced a quote from Dr. Bettina Love <https://bettinalove.com/about/> for discussion in advance of showing three short videos highlighting student voices about their experiences growing up Black, and conversations with white people and Asian americans on race. Click to see New York Times videos about identity in America. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/your-stories/conversations-on-race>

Of the three videos, it was clearly the white group that was most uncomfortable talking about issues of race. When asked, they said they identified as Americans. The other groups always used a qualifier such as Asian American or African American. White people don't have to think about their racial identity like other groups do. Someone in the film reaffirmed "if you're lighter, you're whiter, you're judged on your skin color. Skin color can be used against you or used to support you." While most people don't think they are racist or condone racism, they are still holding onto a system of advantages and disadvantages. We should all be able to just be Americans. How do we break down racial stereotypes?

Teachers on the Committee commented that even at the elementary school level it is important to have these conversations in the classroom with students. However,

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teachers need to have these same conversations first with colleagues. It is essential that the staff process this initially; what are their experiences with violence, injustice, racism and how do they address it with students no matter what subject area they teach.

Finally, what can we do, how do we mobilize? How do we reinforce what Race Matters stands for? How do we set up an infrastructure for when the next incident occurs? Natalie explained that we start by having a dialogue, and it opens the doors to talk about it further. We can't be silent any longer. We need to disrupt and dismantle the system. No one has all the answers and this work is challenging. We all need to expect and accept a level of discomfort when discussing topics like white supremacy and racism.

Natalie said that "we need to build racial literacy muscles. At first they will be sore and you feel the pain, but this is our goal in a space where race matters." We also need to examine who this work is for in Dobbs Ferry. We are serving our BIPOC kids and making sure we have equity in education for all our students. The Committee also serves the staff who work in the DFSD. Natalie suggested articles/research around:

- Looking at **best practices documents** that are particularly effective for promoting equity across a district
- Developing a **Racial Equity Checklist** like surgeons use to follow lifesaving protocols for surgery
- Staying the course, **pushing through the pushback.**

This work will always be too fast for some, and too slow for others. The Board of Education will decide what are the non negotiables and confirm the District's commitment to culturally responsive education.