

Inaugural Race Matters Committee Meeting 12.16.20

Dr. Brady welcomed everyone to the first virtual meeting of the Race Matters Committee. The Committee is composed of 45 members (including 20 DFHS students), teachers, staff, parents, Board of Education and community stakeholders, representing BIPOC Affinity and Allies members across the three schools, PTSA Diversity Committee members, Dobbs Ferry Schools Foundation members and community members at-large. Lisa thanked everyone for participating in the Committee and emphasized how important this work is within our District, especially with what's going on in the community at present.

Natalie McCabe Zwerger, Esq. M.Ed. Director, CSS NYU Steinhardt Metro Center will be facilitating the monthly Race Matters Committee meetings. The Dobbs Ferry School District is proud to partner with this national equity and racial justice center, and began working with Natalie in the spring. Natalie has been an educator for 20 years and is also an attorney. She has already engaged with the Board and the Administrative Cabinet on the topic of race and equity. In addition, she works directly with the District White Allies Study and Action group and the BIPOC Staff Affinity group. Tonight's meeting focused on race and identity.

The role of the Race Matters Committee is to build capacity and understanding together -- to make recommendations to the BOE and create a timeline -- to ultimately have impact that's possible. Our goal is to get endorsement and then operationalize those recommendations. The Committee will set up ways to engage with each other so that we can discuss openly and honestly anti-bias and anti-discriminatory practices.

The first thing the group did was look up the indigenous land that Dobbs Ferry sits on, as not many of the members were aware of the history of the community that far back. You can go to <https://native-land.ca/> and put in 10522. It can be helpful to map indigenous lands in a way that changes, challenges and improves the way people see the history of their homeland and its diversity.

Natalie led the Committee members through a series of interactive exercises to think about why they wanted to join this committee, and what they are hoping to achieve. Most members agreed they wanted to see intrinsic change, and gain a deeper understanding of different people's perspectives on race and equity. The students in particular felt that while our town is very privileged, people of color are disadvantaged.

Natalie set forth the four community agreements for how to navigate complex and emotional topics and reflections:

- Stay engaged
- Experience discomfort

- Speak your truth
- Expect and accept non-closure

Everyone acknowledged that they were ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work. The group talked about accountability, not just talking about issues, but that actual steps need to be taken.

We did a personal reflective activity to understand where we are individually situated in historical and contemporary oppression.

This exercise helped the group talk about race from an emotional level. How can we create a space where students and staff can be their full and whole selves every day. Each individual should get to choose and build their own box. We have to reflect on how our onions are different. It is important to be aware of our own lens and how that intersects with other people's emotional lens.

Here are some member suggestions for first moves the Committee might consider:

1. Talk about our history and biases.
2. Have people who have experienced bias talk about it to others.
3. Ask adults to help set an example for their children/students.
4. Provide teachers with additional unconscious bias training.
5. Recruit diverse staff that reflects the student body.
6. Talk about race more than once a month; mind shifts are so important, but we can't wait for that, we have to move ahead.
7. Build upon the NYS imperative stating schools need to be culturally responsive.
8. Address microaggressions and macro harms. Mindset and action come together.
9. Unlearn preconceptions and then relearn truths.
10. Talk regularly and engage in dialogue.

In conclusion, Natalie expressed to the Committee that no matter how well intentioned people are, the harm is done and it's important to focus on the hurt and impact. This is difficult work, but it is community building and discomfort leads to growth.