

Race Matters Committee Meeting 2.10.21

Facilitator Natalie McCabe Zwerger noted that today's discussion would be grounded in Black History Month (February), and pointed out that the committee had four sessions remaining to flesh out recommendations. The group will ultimately be focusing on approximately five areas of impact, and the next step would be to start defining those areas.

In Dobbs Ferry, for Black History Month we're highlighting what it means to be peaceful, brave and inspire conversations, although we are not just highlighting and celebrating Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, but looking at modern day activists in the Black community as well. How does the world we **lived in** affect the world we **live in**? Administrators are sending messages and resources weekly to teachers in the classroom to help them in connecting ancestral and contemporary Black history. In school, teachers are centering Black authors, reading new narratives from another perspective. It becomes important to honor people making history every day.

The committee watched an interview with Dr. Gholdy Muhammad, an author and associate professor of language and literacy at Georgia State University. In addition to Dr. Muhammad, committee members were introduced to Dena Simmons, Yaa Gyasi, Dr. Uche Blackstock, Amanda Gorman, Mathew Kay (he spoke at DFSD Superintendent's conference day) Monique Morris, and Lisa Sharon Harper... just a handful of notable people who are invested in creating equity in education and beyond.

Small group discussions within the larger committee provide the space to support each other and also examine pushback. The members have been reading assigned articles as well as watching films focusing on the difficulties of such conversations. Different anecdotes resonate differently with each individual. The way we talk about racism is through the lens of our own experiences. Committee members asked, "Once we end up with recommendations, how do we know what we're doing is working? How do we measure success?"

Natalie suggested we start with storytelling, ask more questions and pinpoint where are the biggest racial disparities... in the curriculum, sports, graduation rate, special education, disciplinary action, teaching practices, etc. Only when the people who experience the most inequities see and feel it happening less, is it working. Surveying students annually about their experiences and measurements over time will provide insights into real climate change. Capturing student voice is how we know. Focus groups and panels are places to see growth over a period of years. When the narrative of students' changes, then you can see growth. It is important to chart their experience in the district.

It is also key to get a pulse on where the community is? The NYSED has designed a Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) Educational Framework to support education stakeholders in developing and implementing policies that educate all students effectively and equitably. Schools will be choosing items in their best practices and ranking them to provide recommendations in areas such as curriculum, professional learning, etc. Examining where social justice themes lie in the curriculum and where they are lacking, will also be part of this review. What are we teaching and how are we teaching it in all content areas. We must continually ask questions like, "How can this unit plan help students learn something about themselves or others? What new people,

places and things am I teaching? How much have students advanced in their identity evaluations?”

The CR-S Framework, with guidance from The New York University Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, marks the journey forward and begins the evolution toward leveraging difference as an asset. The framework is grounded in four principles:

- Welcoming and Affirming Environment
- High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction
- Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment
- Ongoing Professional Learning