

FAIRVIEW SCHOOL DISTRICT 72



To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Administrative Team, Fairview Faculty and Staff

Re: Current Status D72 Equity and Diversity Work

Date: July 21, 2020

In light of the circumstances throughout the country regarding the mistreatment of minorities, specifically black people, it is appropriate and necessary for the District to relook at the work that has been done in relation to Equity and Diversity. Our work will not be done until every single student and staff member feels safe, valued, and heard. It is critical that our students understand and appreciate experiences and identities that are unlike their own. We have worked hard but still have a long way to go, and we are strongly committed to continue to make Fairview a more inclusive and equitable school.

This report intends to inform the Board of the work that has been ongoing for several years, but more specifically since the adoption of the 2019-2023 District Strategic Plan.

Recently, the Illinois State Board of Education made the following statement:

"ISBE urges schools and districts to plan for and implement the transition to in-person instruction through the lens of equity. As described in ISBE's equity statement, "Illinois has an urgent and collective responsibility to achieve educational equity by ensuring that all policies, programs, and practices affirm the strengths that each and every child brings within their diverse backgrounds and life experiences, and by delivering the comprehensive supports, programs, and educational opportunities they need to succeed." This collective responsibility has never been more salient, with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating economic inequalities,

heightening the digital divide, and worsening conditions for students whose mental and physical health and safety was already at risk. The brutal death of George Floyd and the days of nationwide protests in its wake call upon us as educators to recommit to eliminating all forms of racism in our school policies. We must be available and open to hearing students' concerns. We must root our curricula in the context of what students see in the world around them. We must value difference."

Background

In December of 2018 the Board of Education commenced an in-depth Strategic Planning process that involved all stakeholders. Participants included current Board of Education members, faculty members, support staff members, administration, parents, community members and current and former students. This work was facilitated by Mr. Jeffrey Cohen, whose work focuses on "*Courageous Conversations and Brave Dialogue*." The final

Board approved Strategic Plan included six (6) Goal areas to guide future planning for the District. Specifically, Goal 3 addresses Diversity and Inclusivity. It states:

"Embrace the racial, ethnic, gender, religious, and/or socio-economic diversity of our district to reflect the values of the Fairview Community."

Four specific objectives were identified with correlating Activities to be implemented throughout the course of the multi-year Strategic Plan.

Objective 3.A - Celebrate Fairview's diverse faculty and staff
Activity(s) - Report to the community of current diversity of Fairview faculty and staff, Engage in Skokie's "Coming Together" program

Objective 3.B - Recruit and hire the most qualified educators
Activity(s) - Review current recruitment procedures, Seek professional development for leadership team for recruiting

Objective 3.C - Conduct teacher training supporting diverse student populations
Activity(s) - Staff Development - Diversity/Cultural Sensitivity/Bias, Research Affinity Group model for implementation at FV

Objective 3.D - Highlight diversity within curriculum
Activity - Include diversity requirement in all program review cycles

The Strategic Plan provides a blueprint for the work of the faculty and staff

at Fairview. Several areas of this work are highlighted in this report.

Staff Development

Over the past two years, Fairview faculty and staff participated in several activities to expand thinking and deepen knowledge related to equity and diversity.

★ SEED Program

Fairview School District 72 and SkokieCares collaborated to offer SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) to several Fairview teachers. The mission of the National SEED Project is to drive personal, organizational, and community change toward greater equity and diversity.

SEED seminars are not lectures. Rather, they include interactive activities and conversations often stimulated by films and readings. Through personal reflection and testimony, listening to others' voices, and learning experientially and collectively, SEED equips people to connect their lives to one another and to society at large by acknowledging systems of oppression, power, and privilege—and challenges them to push for change.

Yolanda Toni, Carrie Rodas, Jen Gooze and Courtney Laufenberg participated in the training during the 2019-2020 school year. Below is their reflection on participating in this program:

SEED provided a great opportunity for education and personal growth regarding the intersectionality of race, ethnicity and gender. Since a single professional development training would only skim the surface of the depth of knowledge provided by the program, we highly recommend other interested staff members to take advantage of SEED. We each participated in 30 hours of interactive education which was a personal journey for each of us since we all started from different positions in life. One of the big concepts from the program was “when you know better, you do better” and we couldn’t agree more. The readings, video clips, and personal accounts we experienced were eye-opening and mind-expanding. As we learned, you don’t know what you don’t know, and the resources provided by SEED were a good jumping off point for in-depth discussions, self-reflection, and further inquiry.

★ Trauma Informed (ACES)

All Fairview staff members have been trained in Trauma Informed Practices. A small group of staff delved more deeply into ACES and have become District 72 leaders providing professional development, meaningful conversation, and strategies for our staff. Mr. Mike Lopatka also attended an Administrator's Academy titled *Fostering a Trauma Sensitive Learning Environment: A Team Approach* by Dr. Kristin Souers.

★ Niles Township Institute Day

Every two years, Niles Township holds a township institute day that includes all school districts. On March 1, 2019, a variety of sessions were held across the township, and school faculty were able to choose which to attend. Each session involved a presenter that had expertise in a variety of topics that support our staff in the work they do with our students daily. Those sessions were:

- *Creating Trauma-Informed Classroom Communities* by Dr. Doug Bolton
- *Building a Culture of Empathy in a Digital Age* by Dr. Devorah Heitner
- *Diversity: The Immigrant and Minority Cultural Perspective* by Mr. Habeeb Quadri
- *Beginning the Journey on Equity* by Ms. Corrie Wallace
- *School Safety Early Identification and Identification* by Dr. Nancy Zarse

After attending sessions, staff came back to Fairview to have conversations about what they learned. For the second half of the institute day at Fairview, faculty participated in an additional workshop with Dr. Nancy Zarse focused on identifying indicators for students struggling with social and emotional well-being, and how to take preventative action to help students feel supported.

★ Habeeb Quadri: *Diversity: The Immigrant and Minority Cultural Perspective*

Habeeb Quadri is the principal at the Muslim Community Center Academy in Skokie. In 2019, Habeeb received the National Distinguished Principal Award from the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Habeeb's presentation focused on his experiences being an immigrant student in American public schools. On April 29th, 2019, Mr. Quadri was invited to Fairview to address the entire staff. In his presentation, Mr.

Quadri discussed what immigrant students might face in our classrooms, such as language, clothing choices, cultural food, faith, and many other topics that can impact a child in many ways. Habeeb encouraged our staff to discuss our own student population through the lens of immigrant children, and what their experience might be like when they start school in District 72.

Curriculum

When faculty, staff and administration make decisions about adopting a new curriculum and/or purchasing books or novels for classroom use, we take into consideration several important factors.

Some of these factors include:

- Representation of diverse characters, authors, and illustrators by race, gender, and abilities.
- Focus on the variety of ethnicities and cultures that make up our World.
- Inclusivity of various perspectives and portrayals to help students understand the experiences of historically underrepresented peoples.
- Curricular and classroom materials that are representative of Fairview's population to help encourage students' to make cultural experiential connections.

We have asked teachers to specifically outline the ways they teach equity, diversity, and inclusion in their classrooms through the use of these resources. It should be noted that staff have conversations with students that come up organically through "teachable moments" while teaching in their classrooms, each day. The curriculums used in our classrooms are listed below.

- **Reading:** *Journeys*
- **Science:** *National Geographic, HMH Dimensions*
- **Social Studies:** *Pearson Education myWorld and American History Series*
- **Supplemental Curriculums:** *Scholastic News, Upfront Magazine, Newsela*
- **RAD lessons** with our School Social Work Team, focused on diversity, inclusion and empathy

Additionally, for the 2020-2021 school year, through the *Second Step* Social Emotional Learning Curriculum, teachers will be able to continue to support students in developing skills to enhance self-worth, express

empathy, and strengthen coping skills to prepare them for current and future life experiences.

Student Programs & Activities

In addition to curricular programs, District 72 staff and administration look to provide meaningful and unique experiences for students. Over the last ten years, Fairview has had an ongoing partnership with the Northlight Theatre, who has helped provide educational programming for our middle school students. This has involved students attending performances at the theatre, as well doing pre and post show lessons with Northlight staff. Fairview staff typically choose a performance with a theme centered around diversity, inclusivity, historical perspective, or one that has a cultural message. Below are some of the shows our students have attended during our partnership with Northlight Theatre:

- **A Civil War Christmas:** *“On Christmas Eve in 1864, a fugitive from slavery and her young daughter have become separated in unfamiliar Washington, DC. As the desperate mother searches the snowy streets for her child and Mary Todd Lincoln searches for the perfect Christmas tree for the White House, familiar faces from our nation’s history cross paths and storylines in this uplifting epic filled with traditional music and themes of family, reconciliation and communal hope.”*
- **The Whipping Man:** *“Three men reunite in the aftermath of the Civil War – a Jewish Confederate soldier and two former slaves who were raised in his household. As the men struggle to rebuild their lives, they uncover a tangle of secrets that threatens their family and their shared faith.”*
- **Black Pearl Sings:** *“Featuring beautiful, a cappella renditions of rare American folk songs, this play with music tells the Depression-era story of two extraordinary women dependent on one another to gain acceptance in a divided society. When Susannah, a WPA song collector for the Library of Congress, overhears Pearl singing in a Texas prison, she will pull every string possible to introduce the woman with the silky voice and steely spirit to the world.”*
- **Woody Sez:** *“This musical portrait celebrates the colorful life and rich musical legacy of the legendary Woody Guthrie, who defined an American era of social consciousness and political expression with songs like “This Land is Your Land” and “The Ballad of Tom Joad.”*
- **Detroit 67:** *“Detroit ’67 tells the story of conflicting siblings against a backdrop of the race riots that shook Detroit, Michigan, in the summer of 1967. Chelle and Lank are brother and sister who share their recently inherited childhood home. They work together, scraping enough money to make ends meet.”*

- *Butler: "Early in the Civil War, three escaped slaves arrive at a Union fort to seek sanctuary from Major General Butler. Despite the conflict between the states, law requires that the slaves be returned to their rightful owner. Seeking a solution that satisfies both ethics and duty, Butler embarks on a battle of words and wits, calling into question what is legal versus what is right in a captivating story based on actual events."*
- *Faceless: "Eighteen-year-old Susie Glenn is on trial for conspiring to commit acts of terrorism, and recent Harvard Law grad and practicing Muslim, Claire Fathi, has been brought on to prosecute. Though pitted against one another in the courtroom, these two young women are fighting a similar battle to defend their morals, motives and religious freedoms in this riveting and timely new drama."*

In January 2019, middle school students attended a program entitled *The MLK Project* hosted at Fairview. The MLK Project is a one-woman show, in which the character discovers her artistic and activist voice through studying the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago. Prior to the show, District 72 staff were provided a learning guide from the organization, and had open dialogue on the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago in their core classrooms. After the performance, students were able to ask questions, and debrief in their classrooms.

Following *The MLK Project* in February 2019, through our partnership with both Northlight Theatre and the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, 7th grade students were invited to a special viewing of *Martin Rising: Requiem for a Dream*. *Martin Rising: Requiem for a Dream* was a performance by local student actors, and was adapted from author Andrea Davis Pinkney's book.

Additionally, our 8th grade students have visited the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center every year since 2009. This trip includes a guided tour of the museum and the amazing experience of hearing a speaker who is a Holocaust survivor. The trip's main focus is being an "Upstander" in society when faced with making decisions on social justice.

Equity and Inclusion Club was planned and implemented by Yolanda Toni, Katherine Chung, Janine Laverdiere and was offered as one of the options for Sping Clubs last school year. The purpose of this club is to bring support and awareness for often marginalized groups. The club brochure description of this group is as follows:

Are you concerned that groups of people in our society are being excluded on the basis of gender, race, sexuality, class, or religion?

Do you want a better understanding of these groups of people to become a great ally? Would you like to help develop a plan to help others in our school? Inclusion means everybody gets to take part. Equity means all people should have access to the same opportunities. If you want to work towards the goal of a more equitable and inclusive Fairview, this club is for you!

Although the club had only two in-person meetings before the school closure, loyal members continued to meet virtually with teachers and school counselors. Many of the resources were taken from SEED training. Topics covered this year included:

- The Wheel of Oppression- defining the "ISMs"
- Gender Diversity and Definitions
- The Danger of a Single Story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Stereotyping)
- Whiteness and White Privilege
- COVID-19 and the Navajo Nation (along with other marginalized groups affected by COVID)
- The 19th Amendment voting rights and the gender pay gap
- Women overcoming adversity and being in positions of power... i.e. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Michelle Obama
- LGBTQ Pride Month and the Stonewall Riots

In the next school year, we hope to expand the participation and possibilities for the club to include more opportunities for activism. Events with the elementary grade levels may be organized. Participants have been interested in pursuing particular topics with more depth, such as gender equity/diversity, antiracism, and No-Naming Calling Week.

Community Engagement

Coming Together

- Mr. Mike Lopatka, Middle School Principal, and Mrs. Colleen Larkin, K-4 Principal, served as the District's representatives for the *Coming Together Program* for the 2019-2020 school year. *Coming Together* is a program which seeks to build knowledge and appreciation for the diversity represented in Niles Township. Meetings were held monthly with other local community leaders at Niles Township District 219.
- The theme for this past year was "Journeys to Niles Township", which focused on community members sharing their stories of how they arrived in Niles Township, each with a unique perspective, and story to share. Some shared stories of recent immigration, while others

shared stories of fleeing oppression or relocating in search of creating a better life for their families.

- Events that celebrated the rich diversity and culture of Niles Township were published through the weekly Digital Backpack, informing and inviting Fairview families to participate. Some of these events included, but were not limited to, book discussions, storytimes, art exhibits, and cooking classes, all which centered around the diversity, equity, and inclusion of community members from a variety of ethnic groups and backgrounds.

Early Childhood Alliance

- Mrs. Colleen Larkin and Ms. Jenny Marin, Kindergarten Teacher, are the District's representatives for the Early Childhood Alliance, which was just established in November 2019. Colleen and Jenny have attended meetings on a regular basis for this program.
- The mission of the Early Childhood Alliance is to *"To advocate for and coordinate comprehensive community-based support for young children and their caregivers that promote equity and honor strengths and diversity."*
- Through this partnership, we will be collaborating with 10 other school districts to work together to fulfill this mission, by creating community events that support professional development for educators, collaborative screening and placement, child, family and community engagement, and high-quality learning experiences.

Next Steps

As previously stated, the District has much work to do in relation to equity. With a clear Strategic Plan for our blueprint, the direction moving forward is clear and attainable.

With regards to the next steps for Fairview, we recommend developing a diversity and equity committee. Some areas of consideration that could be brought to the committee are as follows:

- Strategic Planning Goals for 2020-2021 School Year
 - Engage in Skokie's Coming Together program
 - Review current recruitment process
 - Seek professional development for leadership team for recruiting
 - Professional Development Focus: Diversity/Cultural Sensitivity/Bias
 - Research Affinity Group model for implementation at Fairview

- Include diversity requirements in all program review cycles
- Professional Development:
 - Encourage additional staff members to participate in SEED training.
 - Form a staff committee who will lead Monday PD sessions using video clips, chapters from books, things learned from SEED.
 - Re-start the Fairview book club and meet on specific Mondays to discuss various diversity topics.
 - Provide resources for lesson planning surrounding teaching antiracism.
 - Continue to explore potential partnerships with local organizations. Dr. Cindy Whittaker and Mr. Mike Lopatka attended a virtual meeting for a “Call to Action” with the local organization, Skokie United. We hope to continue conversations with this organization. Another organization which the District is in contact with is *Affirming Voices*, an organization committed to supporting the growth and development of educators’ racial and socio-cultural consciousness, to better serve students and their families.
 - Explore YWCA Equity Institute Initiative; *Becoming Equitable Institutions*, which offers a series of training providing organizations an overview of how to begin and implement an equity initiative at Fairview.
- Community:
 - Monthly email of equity and diversity events in the area (speakers, webinars, movies, etc)
- Holidays:
 - Evaluate how we teach holidays---can we do better? Could the current traditions be offensive to some?
 - Change Columbus Day to Indigineous Peoples’ Day
- Equity and Inclusion Club:
 - One reason for participating in SEED originated from a discussion about a club for students during strategic planning.

- Our first club meeting started this past spring club session.
- Early Childhood Alliance:
 - Previously, last spring Colleen Larkin joined the Early Childhood Alliance Steering Committee. In partnership with this program, she will sit on the planning committee to host a virtual event with Jane Elliott, which will be offered to all of Niles Township and other neighboring communities. Jane is an active anti-racism activist who understands the issues early childhood educators' experience. She is an internationally known teacher, lecturer, diversity trainer, and recipient of the National Mental Health Association Award for Excellence in Education. The link to her bio can be found here:
<https://janeelliott.com/>