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Vanguard Practices

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from practitioners

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A message from

Joyce Carr

SAANYS President
2017-2018



Equity and Diversity

As I reflect over the last year and the experiences that I have had as the SAANYS president, the moments that I have cherished most are when I had the pleasure of meeting new people. I have attended state and national conferences, local celebrations of colleagues, and a few bureaucratic events. These occasions have given me the opportunity to meet all types of people, and the one thing we have had in common is our diversity. Diversity is what makes our conversations deeper. Diversity is what enables us to think independently together. As educational leaders it is imperative that we heed what Stephen Covey said, "Strength lies in differences, not in similarities." We are privileged to live in a diverse nation and state, and as we grow our educational organizations we must work to ensure that our classrooms, offices, and boardrooms reflect our students, families, and communities. This will not happen by accident. Someone once said that to move the dial on equity, diversity, and inclusion, there must be a shift in culture. We need thorough strategy structure, targets, evidence-based data, mentorship programs, role models with whom underrepresented groups can relate, workplace training for all employees, and creativity. I believe this is our work as school administrators and leaders. The focus of my presidency started with the theme for the SAANYS conference last October, "All In." The premise that we all have to work together to achieve our goals goes further for me, as a special education administrator. "All In" to me also means that we value people as individuals, and that we remove the barriers, not the challenges, so everyone can feel valued and accepted. Equity can be defined as "just and fair inclusion." It is said that an equitable society is one in which all can participate and prosper. The goal for equity must be to create conditions that allow everyone to reach their full potential. Equity creates a path from hope to change. If we are to create diverse and equitable educational environments and conditions, we must be conscious of our current realities. The number one reason it's hard to create change is that we keep thinking the same thoughts about a given subject. We need to force our minds to view things from a different, more favorable perspective,

and then try to hold that new perspective for as long as possible. Analyze the current situation and identify the reasons why we can't stay where we are now. If we want different results, we need to take a different action, even if it is a small one. Finding a small, easy change that has a big result – that's the key to success. And these little changes pile up fast into big changes that are sustainable. Diversity and inclusion must be personally meaningful so that they continue to be on our minds in everything we do long after diversity training has ended. When we create deep connections to each other, we build community and inspire others to follow suit, kindly but courageously leading a wave of change throughout our organizations. I was once given the advice that inclusion is not another thing to put on our plate but it should be the plate on which all other things are placed. We need to be determined to make decisions for our organizations that uphold the values of diversity, inclusiveness, and equity, and to intentionally make space for positive outcomes to flourish. We can begin by revisiting recruitment strategies to ensure that hiring is approached with the objective of fostering diversity and inclusion. We can create inclusive spaces and classrooms where people can spend time with one another, and foster engaging conversations to help people share their experiences and build relationships. We can ensure that policies are built in a way that helps everyone feel like they are truly welcome, safe, and free to be themselves in our buildings and organizations. Education has a history of fostering positive social change. As leaders in this profession, we must take that aspect of our jobs very seriously. We must understand that as educators we can spread awareness. We can stand up for what's right and empower others to stand against what's wrong. Let us be the stewards of inclusiveness, diversity, and equity for our communities and classrooms. Let us be role models and change agents so we can say that under our tutelage we weren't just looking for diverse, inclusive environments. We created them.

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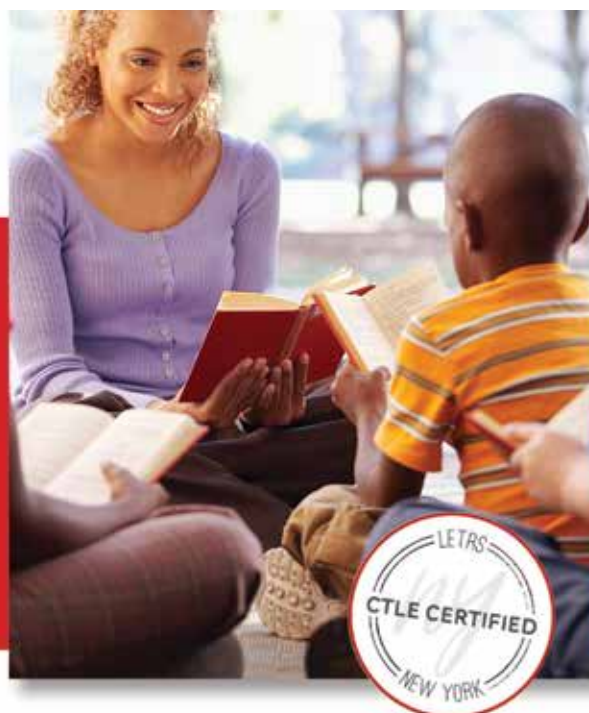
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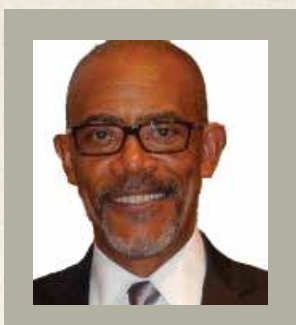


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A message from

Lester W. Young, Jr., EdD

At Large Regent, Board of Regents

Pipeline to Opportunity: Building a Movement to Improve Outcomes for Boys and Young Men of Color

Currently, leaders covering a variety of perspectives continue to stress a deliberate education agenda dedicated to improving college and career readiness rates for all of our nation's students. This agenda has accomplished some important results; however, its goals have not been fully achieved due to the absence of clear policies and advocacy aimed at all students. The resulting disparity in education outcome measures is most acute and apparent for our nation's boys and young men of color. For example, boys of color graduate at lower rates; drop out at higher rates; participate less in accelerated and Advanced Placement courses; are suspended from school at significantly higher rates than their white counterparts; are less likely to be able to read and solve math problems at grade level; and are almost certain to encounter the criminal justice system as either a perpetrator or a victim.¹ Also, numerous reports and studies indicate that schools serving this population are often characterized by the following inequities: inadequate funding that negatively impacts resources; limited access to quality early education; lack of teacher and leader diversity; and ineffective governance structures.²

In February 2014, as part of the national plan of action to create and expand opportunities for all Americans, President Barack Obama unveiled the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) initiative.³ It is designed to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by young men of color and ensure that all young people reach their full potential. My Brother's Keeper has the following six Milestone goals:

1. Getting a healthy start and entering school ready to learn;
2. Reading at grade level by third grade;
3. Graduating from high school ready for college and career;
4. Completing postsecondary education or training;
5. Entering the workforce successfully; and
6. Growing up in safe communities and getting a second chance if mistakes are made.

Responding to this clarion call, the New York State (NYS) Board of Regents accepted the "call to action" by agreeing to implement a cradle-to-college and career strategy to improve outcomes for boys and young men of color at its April 2015 meeting. To address the goals of My Brother's Keeper, the Board established the Workgroup to Improve Outcomes for Boys and Young Men of Color (May 2015) consisting of nine of the seventeen members of the Board of Regents and the Commissioner of Education. The Workgroup was charged with developing educational policy, budget, and legislative recommendations for adoption by the full Board of Regents.

To fulfill its charge, the Workgroup convened a Blue Ribbon Committee consisting of state, regional, and national experts, practitioners, parents, and students, representing the entire Pre-K-20 community. The Workgroup then devised and executed an aggressive two-step statewide collaborative process. Step one of the process consisted of

enhancing stakeholder knowledge regarding the current reality of males of color statewide; developing an incentive structure that inspires action; and designing and executing local action plans. Step two focused on obtaining statewide stakeholder feedback; identifying and promoting what works; refining identified strategies; and establishing a baseline data system. The final report and recommendations were presented at the December 2015 public meeting of the Board and unanimously approved. The recommendations were then presented to the Legislature and with the adoption of the 2016-17 budget, New York became the first state, and remains the only state, to accept the MBK Challenge and enact the initiative into state law with an investment of \$20 million.

In just two years, the number of NYS MBK communities has grown from five in year one to 23 communities and seven Tribal Nations in year two. The Workgroup commissioned and disseminated statewide the My Brother's Keeper Guidance Document: Emerging Practices for Schools and Communities. This document provides outcome trends for boys of color in K-12 school environments and a review of the most prevalent strategies currently being implemented in schools and communities across the country. Additionally, school districts throughout the state, in partnership with local communities, are implementing proposals to:

- enhance family and community engagement;
- address the six MBK Milestones;
- increase the participation rate of historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged individuals in teaching careers;
- establish the MBK Fellows initiative to develop student leadership; and
- identify and expand exemplary, high-quality college and career readiness school models, programs, and practices.

Early indicators reveal that the NYS MBK has exceeded its initial expectations. Going forward, NYS MBK will continue to focus on outcomes; build on targeted investments; explore policy changes that disrupt the barriers to success for poor and working-class youth; and promote the local amalgamation of the resources available in each MBK community to strengthen the network of support for boys and young men of color.

Connecting boys and young men of color to a pipeline of opportunity can correct the inequities that have impeded their educational and life's outcomes; change the prevailing deficit-based narrative; and, ultimately, ensure that all of our students realize their full potential in New York State.

¹ Economic Costs of Youth Disadvantage and High-Return Opportunities for Change, Executive Office of the President of the United States, July 2015.

² *Black Lives Matter: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, 2012.

³ *A Call for Change: A Preliminary Blueprint to Improve Educational Excellence and Opportunity for African American Males in Urban Public Schools*, August 27, 2012; *A Call for Change: Providing Solutions for Black Male Achievement*, Michael Casserly (editor), December 2012; and *Saving Black and Latino Boys: What Schools Can Do to Make a Difference*, February 2012.



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A message from

Dr. Regina K. Huffman

SAANYS President 2018-2019
and Chair of the Diversity Committee
of the SAANYS Board of Directors



To Be or Not to Be: Diversity Is the Question

In the 21st century, terms such as culturally responsive, culturally proficient, equity and excellence and diversity have been used so frequently

that their impact and possibly their significance have diminished. In many school districts, they have been connected to Black History Month or an isolated multicultural event. In order to be effective, the basic theme behind these concepts must be a goal that is intergraded into the day-to-day operations of the school's strategic plan to prepare students for a multifaceted world with its plethora of variances.

What is diversity?

Despite the numerous ways diversity can be defined, when many people think of diversity, they tend to think of race. It is so much more than that. Diversity has been defined as regional, rural/urban, small city, suburban variances encompassing, but not limited to, the differences between race, gender, age, physical abilities, culture, sexual orientation, political beliefs, and skill sets. Having a standard definition in an organization aids in intentionally creating opportunities for ongoing dialogue.

Why diversity?

Having an organization that is representative of the communities in which it serves, while fostering an inclusive environment for our students, staff, and their families, is central to progress. Encouraging a broad range of opinions, ideas, and perspectives helps to drive creativity and innovation, among other things.

My science background often provides me with a unique perspective. When the broad topic of diversity comes to mind, for example, I think of biodiversity – bio meaning life or living and diversity meaning variation or differences. In biodiversity negatives do not inherently exist. There are different organisms with various attributes that together contribute to a spectacular environment where all can coexist and thrive. Anup Shah writes, “The richer the diversity of life, the greater the opportunity for medical discoveries, economic development, and adaptive responses to such new challenges as climate change.” However, diversity in schools is rarely openly received. It has been known to cause uncomfortable, stressful, and even apprehensive environments. Rather than lead to openness and transparency, in my experience, diversity in its purest state often generates defensiveness, opacity, and divisiveness that works against inclusivity.

Jim Collins noted, “In order for an organization to move from good to great, there must be an in-depth self-assessment in which the brutal facts are identified and addressed.” One of the greatest implications or brutal facts of diversification is change. Even though the world that our students are entering is continuously evolving, our educational systems are apparently equivalent to purchasing new technology; quickly antiquated, the upgrades for 2.0 are available before mastery of 1.0 is accomplished. If a probe into the belief systems or

the implicit bias that exists was done, it would probably cause quite a few raised eyebrows and more expressions of disbelief, than many would care to divulge. Why would this be? We in the field of education need to work to ensure relevant teaching and learning takes place. In the book, *Breaking Ranks II*, some of the basic reasons for the resistance to change are:

- “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” mentality
- Fear of rejection or the perception of incompetence
- If I change, then I must be wrong – believe that what you are doing is right
- Lack of knowledge and understanding of different methods
- Basic insecurity.

Although each of these motives has definitive merit with regard to diversity, I tend to lean strongly toward the “lack of knowledge and understanding” concept. Only through the education of diversity and its multifaceted nature will our educational systems really begin to thrive at levels that can truly prepare students for the global multiformities of society.

Where to begin?

For the changes needed to make diversity and inclusivity an instrument for growth:

- Step 1.** Self-assess: discover your weaknesses and strengths
- Step 2.** Get the right people at the table
- Step 3.** Provide professional development
- Step 4.** Partner with someone who has already successfully traveled down the road you’re currently traveling
- Step 5.** Develop strategic planning
- Step 6.** Implement
- Step 7.** Follow up
- Step 8.** Modify where necessary
- Step 9.** Go back to step one

It is important to remember, there must be judgment-free zones developed that would allow stakeholders to express themselves openly, without fear of judgment or retaliation. This will create an environment for positive relationships to develop and be nurtured as a shift in the educational paradigm takes place. Another essential point to keep in mind is, if you never get past step five, and leave out step four, then diversity has been placed in a bubble. The members of the original team/committee may have gained greater knowledge and understanding, but no real change has taken place, especially where it counts, in the classrooms. The trenches of learning have not been impacted and this is where many school districts find themselves.

If committees are formed, professional development has taken place, a strategic plan has been developed, and then nothing. A catastrophic event has just taken place. More harm than good has just occurred.

Now a decision needs to be made. To Be or Not To Be, Diversity, that is the question.

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The Equity Challenge

By Pat Fontana

All students get a pencil. That's equality. It has nothing to do with equity. Those students who need the school internet to complete their assignments can stay after school to do their work. That's closer to equity but still does not take into consideration why those students need the school internet or whether those particular students are able to stay after school.

Students who have no internet at home and have no access to a ride home after school will be given time during class to complete their assignments. That's equity.

A culture of equity starts at the top, with the superintendent, but equity in the classroom is achieved by the teacher. Teachers who understand their students in terms of their community and their individual situations are the ones who will make the difference for those students.

High school social studies teacher Katherine Mitchell recognized that many of her students were not able to stay after school for tutoring or to work on their assignments. Either the students themselves worked, their parents worked and could not pick them up, or their family had no available transportation. So she arranged her class schedule to give them the time they needed during class to use the school Internet to complete their work.

Mitchell also recognizes that her classes are diverse, socioeconomically and culturally. "When a student acts unruly or is sleepy all the time, there's usually more to the story," she says. One student, in particular, had been pegged as a troublemaker by other teachers when he did not pay attention in class and was falling asleep almost every day. Mitchell pulled him aside and asked what was going on. He told her that his father had left, and the student had to hold down a job that kept him out late at night to help support his family.

Disparities in the classroom such as family income level and cultural differences can put certain students at a disadvantage. They may not have the resources they need to succeed, including something as simple and seemingly obtainable as that pencil. These students also may not get the support they need from family. If the family is low income, for example, the student may need to take on a job that keeps him or her out late at night instead of being able to spend that time studying and completing assignments.

These disparities show up in test results and in overall academic achievement. ACT has studied college readiness by family income and found that lower income students consistently scored lower on their tests. In their 2015 College Readiness Benchmark Attainment by Family Income report, ACT found that only 13 percent of

students from families with incomes under \$36,000 met all four benchmarks on the test compared to 42 percent of those students from families with incomes over \$100,000.

EQUALITY IS NOT EQUITY

While equality and equity are both essential in the classroom, they are not the same thing. Experts agree that disadvantaged students need more than just the pencil that is given to all students. Equity starts at the top, with the superintendent, and manifests itself in the classroom with the teacher.

Diversity, inclusion, and equity expert Raymond Terrell says that teachers are the key to equity in the classroom. Terrell defines equity as "providing each student with what they need, not providing all students with the same thing." He adds that "what schools traditionally do is give every student the same thing" and that is equality, not equity.

Terrell is now a professor emeritus, having retired from 50 years of professional experience with diversity and equity issues. He has been involved in the education system from all sides and at all levels, as a middle school and high school teacher, elementary school principal, superintendent, and college professor, and dean. Before he retired, he served as the associate dean of the School of Education at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

Terrell sees two major equity issues in the classroom: socioeconomic differences and issues of culture and race. Having worked with schools across the country on issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity, Terrell says that he "can predict academic outcomes based on the makeup of the students."

Typically, Terrell says, "schools are set up for mid to upper class white students." Teachers and administra-

tion are then quick to find fault with the students when they don't do well on their assignments or don't pass their tests, but they do not recognize the fault in the system itself. Terrell notes that "as long as we look at the students being the issue, we can't solve" the equity issue. Schools must adjust to meet different needs and that starts at the top, with the superintendent.

Instilling a school culture focused on equity and diversity is an ongoing process. Professional development must address the issues of equity within the school and must be provided by someone who has experience working directly with a diverse student population. Given the high teacher turnover rate, those professional development sessions must be provided on a continuous basis and

When the teacher takes the time to get to know the individual students as well as develop a clearer understanding of the communities in which they live, then the teacher can really start to reach students who come from different backgrounds.

must include all school staff. Terrell advises that the cultural responsiveness of the school must be to "provide teachers insights as to what different students need."

The teacher is the key. "What happens with the teacher is going to make a difference," Terrell emphasizes. When the teacher takes the time to get to know the individual students as well as develop a clearer understanding of the communities in which they live, then the teacher can really start to reach students who come from different backgrounds.

Often, the problem stems from a predetermination of how a child is going to perform based on the student's socioeconomic status, race, or even disability. Teachers and administrators still form opinions of their students on day one of the start of a new

school year, sometimes simply based on how the student looks coming into the classroom.

THE CHALLENGE OF IMPLICIT BIAS

Ruth Turner, chief of student support services and social emotional learning for the Rochester City School District, says that “every human being has biases” and that it is “a natural result of how our brain works.”

Rochester is a large school district with a great deal of diversity and poverty. Approximately 84 percent of its 28,000 students are students of color, including African American and Hispanic, as well as students whose families are from Somalia, Nepal, and Afghanistan, among other nations. There are 30 different languages spoken throughout the family populations in the district. Rochester has been ranked third in the nation in childhood poverty. However, the teaching population within the district is primarily made up of white females. As Turner summarizes it, “We face multiple challenges in our city and in our school district.”

Implicit biases, Turner says, “lie in the subconscious way that our brains filter information.”

Teachers often have an implicit bias as to which students will perform and be successful and which will be disruptive and aggressive. Even though the teacher may deny any explicit prejudices, implicit bias still exists. That’s just human nature, as Turner emphasizes. When a group of students includes several from a different culture, several from low-income families, and several from different races, the teacher will generally automatically form expectations around which of those students will be troublemakers and which will be high performers.

Turner offers an example of teacher influence as a result of implicit bias. Relaying a true story told to her by a student at a high performing high school, she says that two students were good friends and were both in an advanced class. They both scored a 12 out of 20 on a particular test. One student was black and her

close friend was white. On the white student’s test, next to her score, the teacher wrote “I expected better of you.” The teacher made no such notation on the black student’s test, sending the message that her score was exactly what was expected of her.

To address the issue, Turner recommends district-wide training for everyone on implicit bias, including looking at what equity means as well as the social justice framework. Self-reflection can often help participants identify that implicit bias within themselves.

Given the very nature of implicit biases, it is difficult for a teacher or an administrator to recognize their impact on how students are treated, which can lead to equity issues within the classroom. An implicit association test developed and administered by Project Implicit at Harvard University can help those who take it identify and work on their biases. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) measures “attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report,” by measuring “the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., African American, homosexual) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy).”

The results of the IAT may or may not be surprising. Turner states that 75 percent of all participants nationally have a positive bias toward whites. Taking the IAT can help teachers and administrators “look at how implicit bias plays out in the day-to-day” operations of the classroom and how it can impact students.

RESOLVING THE CHALLENGE

Turner and Terrell agree that consistent, ongoing training is necessary for teachers and administrators to resolve the equity challenge. Recognizing implicit biases and consciously working to overcome them through professional development sessions can have a positive result in the classroom for the impacted students.

Professional development sessions must focus on identifying gaps and learning how to achieve equity in schools. They are best led by those with experience in the educational system, Terrell adds, and not by outside consultants. Having been in the classroom as a teacher, in the school as a principal, and in the system as a superintendent, he knows

Terrell defines equity as “providing each student with what they need, not providing all students with the same thing.” He adds that “what schools traditionally do is give every student the same thing.”

of what he speaks. His recent work has been focused on teaching teachers how to better understand their student populations.

Terrell says the fruits of his labor and the labor of many others are beginning to pay off. Many of the districts that he has worked with are “beginning to address issues of race and class in educational progress.” Schools are beginning to understand that they need to do something different.

In the classroom, that means having a teacher who understands the community, including the specific issues students and their parents face. It means having a teacher who has taken the time to get to know each student as an individual, rather than making assumptions based on implicit bias in regard to race, culture, or socioeconomic status.

Equity in the classroom also means designing tests that are appropriate for the student population and for the material being taught. Too often, standardized tests include terminology or concepts that are not familiar to students from certain backgrounds and cultures. Terrell cited the word “banister” used in one test that was clearly not understood by many of the students. Instead of teaching to the test, Terrell recommends that the “process of



testing needs to be changed to allow students to be tested on material they've been taught" and that is relevant to them.

When teachers take the time to understand that their students may be out late at night working to support their families, are struggling to grasp the material because of their cultural background and/or experiences, or do

not have the resources they need to complete their assignments, they can make those adjustments needed to ensure that, as Terrell emphasized, they are "providing each student with what they need, not providing all students with the same thing."

Recognizing and overcoming implicit biases, identifying where gaps exist for disadvantaged students, instilling

a system-wide culture of equity, and engaging with students to understand their community and culture are critical steps to overcoming the challenge of equity. Terrell says that many schools are beginning to understand these steps and that "things are beginning to really improve."

Schools are finding ways to evolve, starting with the culture of equity instilled by the superintendent, reinforced by the principal, and put into practical application by the teacher.

PAT FONTANA is a business writer and communications trainer, with a background in corporate training and community college instruction. Her business, WordsWorking, focuses on improving workplace communications, concentrating on the fundamentals of human interactions.

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**LOOKING INWARD:**

Embracing Inclusive and Diverse Practices

By Kim M. Smithgall

There's a distinct and visible imbalance characterizing America's classrooms and school buildings today. And that imbalance is especially apparent in New York State, where black and Latino students comprise 43 percent of total enrollments, while just 16 percent of teachers are black or Latino. The balance shifts in some cases when counting school leaders, but the numbers are still disheartening: in the ranks of assistant principals in the state, 21 percent are black and 12 percent are Latino. However, for principal positions, those numbers decline to 15 percent and 9 percent, respectively (*The Education Trust – New York/NYSED*).

"Education is not a field that's been common for black or brown people to get involved with. I think it's just not often promoted on a broad scale as a good thing to do or a viable career option," said Dr. Regina Huffman, who is science chairperson of Elmont Memorial Jr./Sr. High School and district coordinator in the Sewanhaka Central High School District (Nassau County). She was recently named president of the SAANYS Board of Directors and is also serving as the chair of the board's newly created diversity committee.

The data points and statistics seem to populate news cycles and research studies on a regular basis, driving ongoing discussions regarding the need for more diversity in education. Huffman feels that an important first step toward positive change involves embracing a more realistic definition of diversity.

"Diversity comes in all different forms," she said. "Yes, race does play a part, but it's so much more. It could be gender or a woman who identifies herself as a single mom or any other way people identify themselves."

Shenendehowa Central School District Superintendent Dr. Oliver Robinson would agree, adding that discussions about culture and being a culturally responsive school can yield the same initial thoughts. "People hear 'culture' and they automatically go to race – someone who's not white – and thinking that's what we're talking about," he commented. "We all have culture in many different ways, from age to race to religion to

main objectives of the board at the time was to diversify our staff and that has been a focus for well over a decade in Shenendehowa," he said.

Robinson continues that work with colleagues in the district and beyond in an attempt to make inroads that will, in turn, positively impact all students. He and Shenendehowa Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Dr. Elizabeth Wood recently presented at a diversity summit hosted by the New York State Council of School Superintendents, focusing on anti-bias hiring practices – especially as they relate to ensuring students feel connected to their school environments.

"The biggest challenge and the reason we participated in the summit is so people have an appreciation of why diversity is so important in every community, not just communities that have a quote – unquote diverse student population," Robinson commented.

Still, the progress has been slow – in every region of New York and beyond. And in looking at the bigger picture, the lack of diversity (in any of its many forms) is, plain and simple, a disservice to *all* of today's youth. They all have the potential to lose out on the personal experiences and interactions that help them understand that different backgrounds form the foundation for a successful democratic society... and all students can lose out on growth opportunities that will empower them to flourish in multicultural and global workplaces.

SMALL POCKETS OF POSITIVE CHANGE

As this new mindset begins taking hold, there are pockets of change – glimmers of positive light. And these glimmers are coming from all angles. For example, some college and university teacher preparation programs are recruiting more diverse populations of students and also developing creative opportunities for nontraditional applicants to be successful in earning teaching and administrative certifications. The federal My Brother's Keeper philosophies are

trickling down to the state level, allowing New York schools to apply for grant funding to not only diversify the teaching staff, but also to link students of color with adult mentors who share similar backgrounds (see page 3). In addition, the New York State Education Department recently released a grant application for teacher diversity pipeline pilot projects. Under this program, districts can identify promising teacher aides and teaching assistants to receive stipends, tuition, and other perks to help them on the road to becoming certified teachers.

This latter initiative is part of the emerging popularity of "grow your own" programs. For Shenendehowa and other districts, that trend may also include recruiting from the ranks of current students, not just current educators. To this end, the district held a "so you want to be a teacher" event last year.

"These types of activities speak to an unfortunate reality that there are sometimes shortages in people who have a desire to go into education," Robinson said. "So, we have to ask ourselves, how do we tap into the interest of young people early and make sure education is an option for them?"

For Shenendehowa's event, multiple districts got in on the action. "Many Capital Region schools asked teachers to participate and we tried to find those who were great ambassadors for the profession. They were from all content areas and people could have informal conversations with them and learn about the profession," Wood explained, adding that colleges and universities with teacher prep programs were also represented. "As for attendees, we had current students right through to people who were considering mid-career changes. There were a few hundred people there and it was all ranges."

Wood and Robinson are planning something similar this year, with some tweaks to improve the event.

GROWTH IN ANOTHER WAY

The philosophy of "grow your own" may have originated with the idea of promoting from within, but it can also be applied to growing and

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ethnicity. Part of what we have to try to do is to demystify the word."

Robinson was hired more than 13 years ago as a black school leader in a Saratoga County community he describes as "the quintessential type of middle class, largely white community."

"When I was hired, one of the

expanding the minds of those who are happy in their current positions but ready to grow intellectually. In these scenarios, professional development/professional learning is vital. In fact, Huffman, Robinson, and Wood would likely argue that ongoing training is absolutely essential to effect significant change. Huffman suggests that districts begin with an assessment to determine what issues and challenges already exist. "Then you have to reassess at every stage of professional development," she advised.

In Huffman's district, the process moved from the assessment stage to activities that involved building trust among staff members; this happened over a period of time – before the actual diversity topics were even introduced in a series of ongoing training settings.

"What has to happen across the board is you have to build relationships in your organization so you can have the hard conversations," she said. "Once that happens, nobody is going to be offended or go on the defensive. You can be transparent and not feel like you're going to be ridiculed because of it. But, it's important to have the relationships first."

"Start with a core group of people," Huffman continued. "We have five buildings in our district. We pulled around ten people from each building to come together to set up some guidelines for discussions and everyone agreed to live by those guidelines. So, you agreed that you wouldn't interrupt people and wouldn't be judgmental about what a person had to say. And you had to agree because if you weren't willing to live with the guidelines, people couldn't be free to have open and honest discussions."

The process took time; the trust-building took time. But Huffman feels it was a good investment of time because the educators were able to open up and talk about experiences and interactions that deeply affected them. Later, students began participating, as well, and the results were similar.

"For this, we had administrators and teachers and students listening as students honestly discussed how

they felt about teachers who had said they [the students] shouldn't be in an AP class because of who they were – whether it was because they were female, for example, or a person of color," Huffman said. "It was very beneficial for the students to be there because we got to hear things from their perspective and they got to see us not just as the authoritative figures in the buildings, but as people who have their own issues."

The experiences were powerful for everyone and a wake-up call for many. They also paved the way perfectly to a topic that is often the starting point for many diversity trainings: implicit biases.

WE ALL HAVE THEM

"All of us have some implicit biases," Huffman said. Diversity trainings often start with activities that allow participants to accept this as being a natural part of human nature. They then begin to explore and understand their own (conscious and unconscious) biases and how these may affect their interactions with others, including students. This sets the stage for teachers to subsequently learn to develop classroom activities that embrace all of their students' varied backgrounds and help those students feel accepted and supported for who they are.

For school leaders like Robinson and Wood, this type of reflection prompted a review of the materials used in Shenendehowa classrooms. "From a practical standpoint, we started looking at the literature and texts that we were exposing children to and what messages we were sending to students based on those texts," Robinson said.

BIAS IN THE HIRING PROCESS

Implicit biases also come into play in recruiting and hiring situations, potentially affecting who ultimately gets hired. "People feel more comfortable with people who are like them or who seem like them," Huffman commented. "And when you see that happen, you eliminate the possibilities of being able to engage in something that's new and different – and, better,

in most cases."

"I have a science background, so I compare it to a mutation," Huffman mused. "If you have a mutation, you keep replicating that mutation rather than doing something different. It's not that the mutation is bad, but you don't let anything else enter into it that might make it better."

Wood concurs. When she spoke at the summer diversity conference mentioned earlier, she covered some of the biases that can occur when hiring new staff. "Some of the common biases we talked about included sorting people out because they're not 'the right fit.' There's also the idea that bias is sometimes positive; in other words, we might have a positive bias toward someone we already know," she said. "Many people in the audience were nodding their heads as we were talking and they acknowledged that bias is hard to overcome in the hiring process. They were anxious to have conversations on how to address it."

Robinson added that unconscious biases can begin even before someone arrives for an interview. "Even the wording in the ads we place sends messages about certain genders or ethnic groups who are welcome and not welcome in a district," he said. "As a district leader, you have to think about that and also about who is on a hiring committee and the mind-set of that committee."

To help guide the process in Shenendehowa, the district requires anyone who will be on a hiring committee to view a video that discusses best practices for recognizing and overcoming implicit biases and embracing the benefits of a diverse workforce (see https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mvhfPhq_dynjW4FU-SiC7hTABGzdJwX1/view).

Committee members are also asked to take careful notes during interviews. "We want to be sure we're really listening to what the candidates say rather than what we think they say through our own filters," Wood explained. "We try to avoid oversimplification or summarizing candidates by talking about the right fit, but instead talking about the specific strengths and skills they could bring to our organization."

So, the training process is just as important for human resources and those serving on hiring committees as it is for educators working directly with children. "The formalized process is important," Robinson said. "We've been focused on having objective practices for a long time, but in the past six years or so, we really enhanced the focus on diversity." So, why is this training important? Why is diversity important? Someone playing devil's advocate might say this is just another educational initiative that will go away – just be patient; this, too, shall pass.

ADJUSTING THE BALANCE... BECAUSE IT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO FOR KIDS

For Robinson and other progressive school leaders, that would be a flat-out breach of his duties...and a breach of humanity. "It's not just another initiative," he said. "It's really not an initiative at all. It's something that reframes how you look at the collective that is our work. You have to look at this through the lens of how it truly impacts the success of

all students. Once you do that, you realize this isn't something that will come and go. It affects your larger work."

"We want every student to feel like the school environment maximizes their potential and that every student feels included and valued in our system – and that means every student," Robinson added.

This happens when a diverse group of educators embraces the diversities – and similarities – of their students. Students will feel good about going to school (think about those attendance issues and achievement gaps), will have a support system, will embrace diversity themselves...and may even consider schools as places where they want to spend their careers.

"If we believe education is truly the bedrock of our democratic society and we all want to be participants in the process, then our work is mightily important and this defines what public education is all about. We

So, the training process is just as important for human resources and those serving on hiring committees as it is for educators working directly with children.

cannot differentiate or discriminate in terms of who can access public education. Schools are supposed to be safe havens for kids to come and grow and explore and become whatever their beautiful little minds can take them to be," Robinson concluded.

KIM M. SMITHGALL is an award-winning communications specialist and freelance writer, designer, and photographer.



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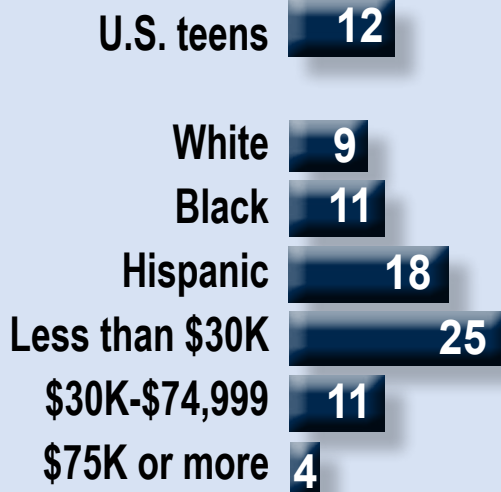
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Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics are of any race. Source: Survey conducted March 7 to April 10, 2018.

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BY LISA MEADE

Assistant Superintendent
Hudson Falls Central School District
2015 NYS Middle School Principal of the Year
for SAANYS/NASSP.

If you ask a group of colleagues why they decided to become a teacher, the stories usually include a reference to an adult that made a difference in their own lives. Some colleagues will also share stories of grit and determination about beating the odds and the only thing seemingly getting them through school was just one amazing adult or incredible teacher they had.

As we learn more about trauma-informed practices in schools, we are becoming more aware of how our actions, intended or not, affect relationships with students. We know that some of the most important work we will do as educators, at any level, is to BE the one; the one that provides a caring and safe relationship that models hope and forgiveness for students. This is easier to write about and think about than it is to implement.

As my own district looked to expand a focus on building relationships with students, I was gifted the book by Manny Scott, *Even on Your Worst Day, You Can Be Your Student's Best Hope* by one of my colleagues. The arrival of the book had come at an opportune time. I was answering some criticism about decisions I had made about a group of students. Some of the critics felt we were doing too much to support these students. At the same time, some of the students within this group were beginning to sabotage their own progress. I'd later learn that this is a part of the path of this work, but at that time I felt like we weren't making the difference we had intended. I secretly wondered if I was failing. The arrival of this book to my office was at the time that I truly needed the reflection – and recalibration, as I like to call it – to get back on track.

Manny Scott, whose story was partially portrayed in the movie the Freedom Writers, is a professional, motivational speaker who bravely shares examples from his own life story to help motivate students and educators around the country. In this book, he aims to use his personal stories to help us understand, or in some cases, become re-inspired to reach even our most difficult students. Each chapter begins with a moral precept that frames the thinking within that chapter.

He challenges us to be prepared each morning, without excuse. "Prepare yourself every morning to be your absolute best. If you have not properly prepared to teach with excellence every day, then you are not honoring the commitment you made at the beginning of your teaching career to hone and educate the young minds under your care (13)." Teaching, and I would include leadership as a form of teaching, involves preparation according to

Mr. Scott. Purposeful preparation that includes taking care of our body, mind, and heart.

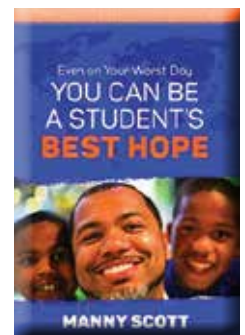
Throughout each chapter of the book he gives advice on how to build relationships with our students. He reminds us that, "Poverty is the lack of access to people who can help you flourish in life (26)." If we do not take the time to build relationships with all of our students, we miss a chance at providing examples of hope to students who need it most.

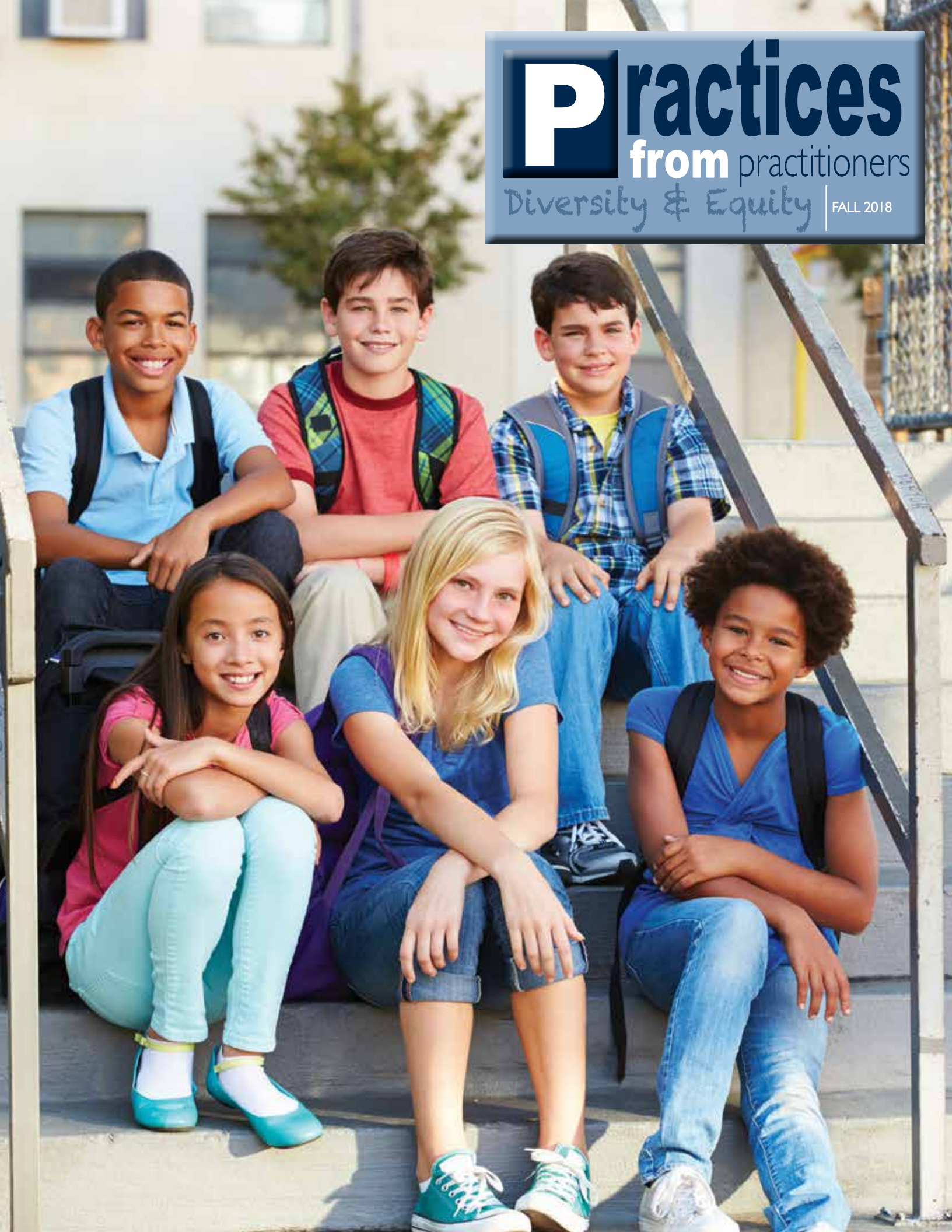
In his book, Mr. Scott also shares his own missteps as a presenter in thinking that all kids and all adults were alike. He writes, "A lack of awareness of one's own culture, particularly ethnocentricity, can lead us to wrongly attribute student's resistance to their moral failures rather than to our own cultural incompetence." This tenet is important. In my former role as a middle school principal, I can recall sharing with some of my staff that we were wrong when we would try to impose our own (middle class) values upon families. We had to find a way to align their vision with our own vision for the success of the child. Mr. Scott says this so much better than I was able to. What I learned from this part of the book is that an investment of real time has to be made to understand students as individuals in our classrooms. Oftentimes, this will require more study and preparation of ourselves – beyond what we do to design and deliver the content curriculum. And still, in addition to that content, we need to be sure we are explicitly teaching soft skills: self-confidence, moral standards, integrity, and more. We need to "connect our content to their context (p. 72)."

This book is an inspiring read that will help realign both a leader's and a teacher's purpose for making a difference in the lives of students. Now more than ever, I believe, we are dealing with so much hurt and pain within our classrooms. This book and it's message of hope can counteract that – and will.

Even on Your Worst Day, You Can Be a Student's Best Hope

Manny Scott





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Sense of (Non)Belonging



By Julie M. Torres, EdD Participation in extracurricular activities is an integral part of the traditional high school experience, yet school administrators often overlook the engagement gap that exists at their schools. Research shows that a student's race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are predictors for their engagement in extracurricular activities, with poor and black and Latino students participating at lower rates (Brown & Evans, 2002; Weininger, Lareau, & Conley, 2015).

In a study I conducted at a suburban high school of a major Northeast city, Latino seniors participated at a statistically significant lower rate (45 percent) than their peers (71 percent). Based on student interviews, this difference can be attributed to Latino students' sense of (non)belonging in the school community.

To address this equity issue, school administrators should examine school practices and remove barriers that prevent student participation in extracurricular activities, such as minimum GPA requirements, community service hours, and chapter membership fees.

To address this equity issue, school administrators should examine school practices and remove barriers that prevent student participation in extracurricular activities, such as minimum GPA requirements, community service hours, and chapter membership fees. Other organizational factors that may negatively impact Latino student participation in extracurricular activities include how information is communicated and disseminated, how students are recruited, how club officers are elected, the presence (or lack) of affinity clubs, and the process by which new clubs are created.

Social and cultural capital plays a significant role in whether students become engaged in extracurricular activities. Doriana, a twelfth-grade Latina student, explained that she learned about club opportunities from her white friends. She explained, "When you're friends with white people, you find out about more things... [because] their parents know what is going on." A member of the Debate Team, the Newspaper Club, and several honor societies, Doriana made a connection between extracurriculars and her academic program. She

recognized that she was an anomaly and described an academic and social hierarchy where disadvantaged Latino students were routinely tracked into less academically challenging courses. According to Doriana, there is an academic and social divide making it difficult to become friends with students who are not in your classes. "I don't really meet people that are in the Regents classes. I never see them...because we're not in the same classes." Doriana was keenly aware of being the only Latina in most of her classes.

Since the academic divide is along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic status lines, it sends messages to students about the classes to which they belong. Latino students relayed repeated negative social experiences, punctuated by moments of cultural incongruence with non-Latino peers, which served to reinforce the message that Latino students did not belong in certain social circles and were not welcomed at certain tables in the cafeteria. These negative experiences followed them into the classroom, where Latino students were reminded that they did not belong in certain classes. For example, Latino students were less likely to participate in cocurricular activities, such as marching band and the Latin Language Club because they were not enrolled in their corresponding courses.

The sense of (non)belonging Latino students felt influenced their participation in extracurricular activities. Latino students avoided clubs that replicated (and even magnified) their negative experiences in classes. Latino students were not eager to repeat those negative experiences and understandably avoided social situations where they were in the minority and marginalized. David, an eleventh-grade Latino student, refrained from joining a business club because it was "mostly white people." Selena, a twelfth-grade Latina student, had similar misgivings about joining clubs. Her feelings of insecurity while

attending club functions were reminiscent of the feeling of "intimidation" she felt about being the only Latina in her Advanced Placement class. Other Latino students also reported taking social risks when they attended school clubs dominated by white students. The social risk was most pronounced during elections when Latino students were reminded that their limited friend networks precluded them from obtaining officer positions because they were simply "outnumbered."

Although a student's sense of belonging is often expressed through school spirit and showcased in school events, it germinates through day-to-day interactions in classrooms. Latino students expressed feeling included or excluded, welcomed or rejected based on their experiences in classrooms with other students and teachers. For many Latinos, their heritage is the most prominent part of their identity, and the most conspicuous difference between them and their peers. Therefore, rejection or exclusion was experienced as a rejection of their identity, and contributed to their sense of nonbelonging.

Aware of the racial composition in their classes, Latino students believed non-Latino students avoided choosing them for group work because they held misconceptions about their academic abilities. Students dreaded when teachers asked the class to form their own groups because it was obvious to them that they were the "leftovers," or last ones chosen.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Participation in extracurricular activities by Latino students promotes positive youth development, increases academic achievement, and helps to close the academic achievement gap. To increase Latino students' membership in the extracurricular activity program, schools have to increase their sense of belonging to the school community by improving the quality of social interactions that they have with their classmates. Osterman (2000) foresees that "many of the changes necessary to satisfy students' needs for belongingness



involve drastic changes in the cultural values, norms, policies, and practices that dominate schooling, particularly at the secondary level.”

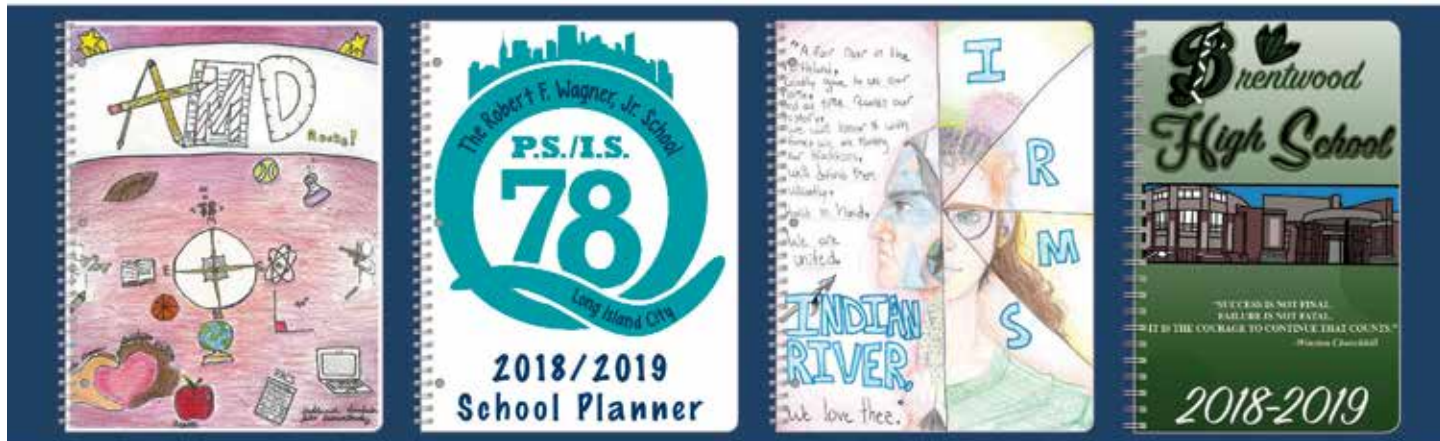
Tatum (2017) explains that in racially mixed settings, the formation of racial groups is a natural part of the developmental process and can serve as a “positive coping strategy” in which adolescents provide each other with support. Latino students would benefit from an affinity group to support their racial identity development, be responsive to their social, cultural, emotional and political needs, and celebrate and validate cultural differences.

Most Latino students who participated in the study valued participation in extracurricular clubs and activities, and increased their involvement when they believed it would improve their college acceptances. In fact, Latino students expressed regret at not having been more involved in extracurricular activities, especially since in retrospect they believed that they could have claimed their membership in the school community with greater extracurricular involvement. College-bound Latino students navigated their participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities notwithstanding their sense of belonging. They developed a resilience that sustained their membership in academically rigorous courses, which they applied to their extracurricular involvement as well. However, schools can facilitate Latino students’ sense of belonging to the school community and increase their level of involvement in school-sponsored extracurricular activities so that they can reap the benefits of participation.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ARE ENCOURAGED TO TAKE AFFIRMATIVE STEPS TO INCREASE LATINO STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BY:

- Engaging in equity practices;
- Improving the school climate and creating a school culture that is inclusive of all students;
- Breaking the culture of low expectations for Latino students, and increasing the enrollment of Latino students in advanced, elite, and selective courses;
- Identifying and addressing microaggressions so that all students feel safe and welcomed, and have a sense of belonging;
- Offering professional development for teachers geared at developing culturally competent practices;
- Adopting a culturally inclusive curriculum that embraces cultural differences;
- Creating classroom tasks that foster social interactions where individuals are assigned to groups in advance and each group member has a role;
- Conducting regular reviews of the extracurricular activity program, which includes using focus groups with student representatives from marginalized populations in order to empower traditionally silent voices and incorporate non-dominant perspectives in the review and decision-making process;
- Reserving spaces suited for socialization that supports a club’s purpose and major activity;
- Including extracurricular activities in orientation programs for incoming students, and in articulation efforts with the middle school;
- Orienting students into the extracurricular activity program so that they feel welcomed into the school community and integrated into the social fabric of the school;
- Increasing the leadership opportunities for Latino students by reviewing and revising, if necessary, the guidelines for officer elections, and expanding mentor opportunities; and
- Including affinity clubs in their extracurricular activity program.

JULIE M. TORRES, EdD, is the assistant principal at Paul D. Schreiber High School in the Port Washington School District.



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Restorative Practices: One School's Story



By Lisa Meade and
Jordan Tezanos

When you walk into any school, you immediately get a feel for the climate of the building. It's not necessarily measured or quantified. You see it in pieces, in how adults interact with each other, with students, and with administration. You sense the climate in classrooms and you witness what a school stands for firsthand in how leaders approach discipline referrals.

In work published about school climate, including *Exploring the School Climate – Student Achievement Connection: Making Sense of Why the First Precedes the Second*, authors Shindler and Jones state that the quality of school climate can be the most foretelling factor in a school's ability to increase student achievement, "and if we want achievement gains, we need to begin by improving the climate."

Current research has created an emphasis for schools to include increased social-emotional supports. This insistence asks us to look at student behavior in alternate ways. Is there an antecedent to the behavior? Do we know what drives some students to act certain ways? Despite the call to action created by evolving practices, the approach in how we (still) handle discipline cases hasn't really kept up.

While many schools continue to use out of school suspension for a myriad of infractions (outside of drugs, weapons, and fighting), the research has told us – for a very long time, we might add – that it doesn't work. Sending students home with a day off from school doesn't feel like a punishment and isn't designed to change behavior. The student will likely miss work and

fall behind as a result of the suspension. These days out often aren't combined with reteaching or efforts to repair the harm. According to the Center for Healthy Schools and Communities, "policies around discipline also need to be evaluated in light of what we know about the impacts of trauma. For example, zero tolerance policies may exclude traumatized children from their school community when they need that community the most. Instead, the school, including mental health professionals, can work to support growth and learning for these students while still holding them accountable for their actions."

Leaders have to decide what the function of real school discipline is. If it's to punish students and demand that they respect the rules (of the "real world," some will proclaim), out of school suspension makes some of us feel better. If the function of school discipline is to allow students to learn from their mistakes and create ways to repair and move on from poor choices and missteps, then a restorative approach is a method needed in our toolboxes. Choosing the latter means school climate is important to the organization.

following:

1. Affirmation that relationships are central to a building's community
2. Systems that address misbehavior and harm
3. Focus on harm and not solely on broken rules
4. Giving voice to the person harmed
5. Engagement of others in problem solving
6. Students to accept responsibility for their actions.

This kind of approach and modeling starts with leadership. "When a child is disciplined, a withdrawal is made on the relationship account. The relationship account itself is based on respect, mutual accountability, and even friendship established within a caring community. If the substrata work of community building has not been done, the child is bankrupt and has nothing to lose by misbehaving or by being confronted. The child's motivation to change is limited" (Amstutz and Mullet, 2015). Leaders shape how a building models respect and delivers on the promise of friendship and accountability.

Schools are about teaching responsibility. But responsibility isn't taught through exclusionary practices alone. Responsibility is taught through a restorative discipline approach. According to the authors of *The Little Book of Restorative Discipline for Schools* (Amstutz and Mullet, 2015), restorative discipline is integral to a positive school climate because it allows for the

When I became assistant principal of Hudson Falls Middle School seven years ago, the principal and I set many goals, but the biggest one was to reduce referrals, suspensions, and repeated violations by the same student(s). Administrators have access to loads and loads of data. We began to plow through discipline data, and we processed referrals, VADIR reports, and other information that shed light on the climate of the building. We concluded that the traditional referral and consequence formula wasn't teaching anything or changing behaviors. Before becoming the assistant principal, I was a teacher in the same building for seven years. I knew the faculty and staff. I admired how hard everyone worked. I witnessed teachers using classroom intervention strategies, building relationships, and engaging parents, yet the data didn't reflect those efforts. How could a building of 500 students be averaging 750 referrals over an eight-year period? How was it possible that in one year of that sample size,

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1,100 referrals were written? Rather than spend time analyzing how we got there, we shifted our approach to responding to discipline, in hopes of never returning there again.

Through our administrative, building, team, and faculty meetings, we set out to improve typical practices like increased visibility, enhancing our character education program, building in positive behavior supports, creating a mentor program, being more deliberate about getting into classrooms, being more present during lunch shifts, and being permanent, positive fixtures during high traffic times. According to Neila A. Connors, “effective leaders are visible and accessible. The best leaders are seen throughout the building. They are accessible...Great leaders have a curriculum that is ongoing in the hallways, lunchrooms, and other places outside of classrooms” (2015).

Over the past four years, a restorative approach has become our most widely used method and has been embraced by administration and teachers. All of our middle school teachers have received training, entire teams are running circles with students, and individual teachers are using circles to improve classroom climate and build social-emotional skills. In an eight-year sample, the annual average number of referrals before restorative practices were implemented was 626. Since we started using a restorative approach as our primary response, our annual average number of referrals has decreased to 329 – a reduction of 47 percent. Our incident data has decreased dramatically and in almost every category. What the data is telling

us is that we are making progress.

We are a middle school and certainly have behavioral challenges. Through restorative practices, we are responding differently, using a reframed mindset to understand behavior and take those opportunities to restore relationships rather than write referrals. We are teaching the vital skills through inclusive conversations, not exclusionary suspensions. None of our accomplishments would be possible without the incredible care, patience, and compassion that our teachers, administrators, and support staff show each day. Our commitment to educating the whole child and sharing a vision for doing so has helped improve school culture and climate.

A STUDENT'S STORY

This particular week started much like any other, students entering the building after the weekend, a myriad of adolescent looks on their faces, telling stories of what they did and who they hung out with. As the crowd began to clear, in walked an eighth-grade boy. For the purpose of this article, we will call him Sam. Sam had been sent to the assistant principal's office several times over the previous week for wearing his hood during the day, a violation of our code of conduct. As Sam entered the building that Monday morning, he looked different. He had a bigger smile on his face, his hair was neatly combed, he had on new clothes, and he didn't have his hood up. On Thursday of the previous week, he was sent to the office for wearing his hood, the sixth time that week. Rather than process

the traditional referral and assign a meaningless consequence, one that in isolation wouldn't have changed the behavior, the assistant principal had a restorative conversation with him, in the form of a mini-circle. Mr. Tezanos (assistant principal), the student, and the school social worker sat down to discuss five simple questions often associated with restorative practice:

1) What happened? – In this case why does this keep happening?

- 2) Who is being harmed when this happens?
- 3) What were you thinking about in the moment?
- 4) What do you need to do to make things right?
- 5) What support do you need to carry out your action plan?

While some circles require pre-planning and various lead-up work, this particular case did not. We knew why the student was wearing his hood, and through his answers, we found a solution. The boy wasn't wearing his hood to purposefully violate the rules and he wasn't doing it to be insubordinate or frustrate the teachers. The boy was wearing his hood because he was embarrassed about his hair. He felt shame in knowing that his family couldn't afford regular haircuts and that they didn't have money for the hair products so many of his grade-level peers had access to. The wearing of that hood was a defense mechanism. In his eyes, he looked different, bad, not the same, and putting that hood up, as silly as it might seem to others, helped him level the playing field, even if it meant breaking a rule.

The mini-circle went well, he said all the things we predicted he would say, and in the “making things right” part of the conversation, he bravely, in a safe, trusted setting, asked for help. That afternoon, Mr. Tezanos went to the local barber shop by his apartment, prepaid for 12 haircuts (enough to last through summer), then went to the local store and bought him a few new outfits and enough hair product to last well until into his 30s.

On Monday, as that crowd cleared, we saw Sam, with a handsome new haircut, meticulously combed, held in place by probably a little too much hair gel and we couldn't help but smile, knowing we were on the right track to solving this problem. Modeling how to use compassion as a resolution was an added bonus. He hasn't been back in the office for any major disciplinary infraction since that Friday afternoon mini-circle. He does come by frequently to simply chat or update Mr. Tezanos on life and in those visits, the social capital that has been built with him is in many ways driving additional

While many schools continue to use out of school suspension for a myriad of infractions...the research has told us – that it doesn't work. Sending students home with a day off from school doesn't feel like a punishment and isn't designed to change behavior.

positive decision making. His pride in belonging is showing! Meeting Sam's basic needs of a haircut, clothing, and even hair gel taught him that he had value to all of us.

By taking the time to help students understand the impact of their choices and by using words other than "get out" or "you're suspended," we have been able to drastically reduce infractions and referrals in almost every category. More importantly, we've modeled, through our actions, that we care. Through all of these interactions, we're trying to demonstrate that at Hudson Falls Middle School, we are more focused on relationships than referrals. In those moments, real social-emotional growth takes place.

In his book, *Collaborative Leadership*, author Dr. Peter DeWitt wrote: "Principals have a real opportunity every single day to create the same kind of relationships with students that teachers do. One of the many powerful aspects of being a principal is that they can foster those relationships over a number of years as students move from grade to grade. It is through the sum total of all those moments that students will learn that they truly do have a voice and that the leaders in the school care about hearing that voice and nurturing it further" (2017).

The example of the boy with the hood is just one of hundreds of circles we've held over the four years since implementing restorative practices. Some have been large circles focusing on disruptive classroom behavior and involving the entire class, others have been for building-wide infractions that involved parents, community members, outside service providers, teachers, counselors, and support staff, and there have been lots of mini-circles as well. There is a great deal of time, effort, and energy that goes into responding to discipline through restorative practices, but the payoff is proving to be well worth it.

IN THE END

Our commitment to implementing restorative practices has served as a timely reminder that student voice should be at the forefront of everything

we do. When a mistake or poor decision occurs, those involved, both victims and perpetrators, need to engage in thoughtful discussion to prevent a recurrence and repair harm. By dedicating time to this process, everyone involved feels important, valued, and validated. As a result, our students reach a level of self-actualization, which contributes to their continued success and directly improves school culture.

If schools are really about preparing students for life, then that preparation must include opportunities to repair harm when it is made and opening our hearts every chance we get. It need not be about the number of times we kick a student out of our schools. It ought to be about how many more students we make room for in our hearts and hopes. That's where the real chance for servitude can be found.

Note: A similar version of this article appeared in the spring 2018 *NYSASCD Impact Journal*.
<http://publications.catstonepress.com/i/972729-spring-2018-impact/3>



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Serving Our English Language Learners: **Making Connections That Count**



By Gretchen Rosales

It was a hot, humid evening in the southeastern Texas community where I was gearing up for another year as an ESOL teacher. I sat outside of Norma's home, speaking with her parents about their family, who resides in Central Mexico. Norma spoke English at a beginning level; her parents spoke no English. My time as a Spanish teacher was serving me well, as I was able to communicate with Norma's family. I wanted them to be able to ask questions about Norma's education. They wanted to know about homework and how quickly Norma would learn English.

They wondered about fulfilling immunization requirements and if Norma would graduate from high school. They served me horchata, the glass sweating in the heat. A little over an hour would prove to be one of the most valuable investments in time. I created a connection between Norma's family and myself, one that would last us until Norma graduated from school and beyond. It was as simple as taking a bit of time to meet my student's family, have a conversation about what was important to them, and answer some questions.

I have spent much of my career as an ESOL teacher, both in Texas and in rural western New York. When I was not teaching in an ESOL capacity, my skills as a Spanish teacher also allowed me to serve as my district's interpreter and translator for the families of our English language learners. In my current role as a middle and high school administrator, I find that the same practices that served me well with my ELL students and their families still hold true with all student

populations. Below are some practices that work for connecting with diverse populations:

Do not underestimate the power of the home visit: I have always found families to appreciate that a teacher or administrator would want to meet them at their home. I would always make arrangements with the families beforehand and we would establish a specific date and time. My visits were meant to be short, no more than ten minutes or so. Sometimes, the visits would last longer. I never cut visits short if the parents wanted to talk. I would often recognize that they appreciated the contact and welcomed the conversation. A staff member would also come with me; this would usually be the counselor or a teacher from the grade-level team. Once the year progressed, I would also stop in if attendance became an issue or if a student was struggling with academics or discipline. Establishing a home-based connection proved to be one of my most invaluable tools.

It was as simple as taking a bit of time to meet my student's family, have a conversation about what was important to them, and answer some questions.

Technology bridges the gap: Before apps like Remind or Class Dojo, teachers had to rely on disseminating information through newsletters and school announcements. Frequently, our ELLs would miss out on opportunities because of a lack of understanding or a delay in communication. Now, it is as simple as typing a text-like response in a student's home language and hitting Send. This is a great way to help students feel connected to the school community because their parents are also connected to the information. For example, does your school have daily themes for homecoming? Use these



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Look for those creative ways to tap into native-language speakers.

Make summer learning fun:

All educators know that students lose some of their skills over the summer. Keeping the learning momentum

rolling during the summer months will be especially important for ELLs. If you are lucky enough to have the opportunity to teach your students throughout the summer, a mock camp makes for a relaxed environment for all students. In the past, I've had sports-themed camps for my students, for example. We would read books about sports, interview local athletes, take a trip to the baseball stadium, and, of course, play different games. One year, we did a trip around the world, which included reading literature from different countries, cooking ethnic foods, and designing our own country. The interdisciplinary possibilities are endless. There was little pressure and a more relaxed atmosphere for learning. Searching out grant funds helped support field trips and supplies to make the experiences accessible. If an extended summer learning program is not a possibility for your district, consider setting up a digital classroom. Google classroom, for example, would be a great way to conduct book talks and discussion boards for the students who have internet access. If that is not possible, try old-fashioned letter writing. I would often write letters to my students and enclose a stamped envelope for them to write back to me. It was a great opportu-

nity to communicate with my students and I still have some of those letters today.

As Pat Guerra states in *A Changing Nation: The Impact of Linguistic and Cultural Diversity on Education*, "The low academic achievement and high dropout rate of cultural and linguistic minorities in public school in the United States are well documented. While the cause of these challenges for minority populations remains the source of much debate, a significant body of research points to the need for the inclusion of students' culture in the instructional settings for these populations to succeed" (2000). Thankfully, including culture and connection in our institutions is easier now, more than ever. Reaching out beyond our school walls to include families in the educational process will strengthen the positive experience for all of our English language learners. As our immigrant populations grow, we can no longer afford to solely direct our efforts inside the classroom. Reaching out into our students' homes, and seeking to communicate fully and effectively, will result in a bond that will last to graduation and beyond.

apps to send a message reminding families of the themes for the next day. This is perhaps one of the simplest ways for students to know about what is going on in their school and to have the chance to feel like they are a part of something special. Knowing that you have to wear your school pride shirt or bring in a special book ensures that the student is more likely to do it, which virtually guarantees their participation. We want all of our students to participate.

Translate, but be careful: As much as I laud the advent of technology and its usefulness in fostering a connection between home and school, I would like to give a word of caution. Web-based translators can work in a pinch, but be careful of what you are actually translating. Once, I had a new parent visit me and she shared a copy of her son's IEP that the former district had run through a web-based translation program. To say that it was difficult to understand was an understatement. The content was riddled with mistakes in grammar and content. For legal documents, I would encourage all schools to find real-life human translators who are able to accurately convert the text. If you are having trouble finding a professional to do this work for your district, reach out to the language departments at local colleges and universities. This has been a great way for many schools to make connections with linguists outside of the home school. For less important jobs, seek resources within the school. My Spanish club students had a lot of fun translating the kindergarten newsletters for our native language families.

GRETCHEN ROSALES is the middle and high school assistant principal in the Alexander Central School District.



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Five Inequitable Practices in Schools That Perpetuate the “Gap”



By Samuelle Simms

Today in the United States, children five years and under do not belong to any majority/minority race category (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). This group has shattered the majority/minority dynamic of race. Let us explore just five of the many practices in our schools that inadvertently support the “gap” in opportunity and achievement. As an educational leader, it is imperative that you recognize that if just one of these is happening in just one of your classrooms – it is happening in your school!

I. MAKING ASSUMPTIONS OF FAMILIES OF COLOR

"If you walked a mile in my shoes..." is a common phrase tossed around by those who possess a telling life tale – one that begs for the introspection, empathy, and respect of the listener. To make an assumption of another person is wrong and to make an assumption of a group of people is unethical. Too often educators rely on their own experiences and what the media chooses to portray as factual. Subconsciously, these "thoughts" become the premise in which we formulate understandings of our student populations and their families. Inevitably, we start, referring to them as "those people" – a subtle yet blatant way to say that a particular group is in a different category when it comes to our values.

Not all black students are poor...
Not all Hispanic and Latino students speak Spanish...
Not all parents of color miss parent meetings because they do not value their child's academic well-being...

Not all Asian students are "intelligent"...
Not all students from single parent households come from broken homes or families...
Not all students of color are violent...

The biggest barrier that we must face in order to learn about the families we serve is OURSELVES. As educators, we must face our own biases and mislearnings. We must let go of ourselves to serve at our highest capacity. No two students are the same, regardless of race or class, and no two families are the same.

2. MICROAGGRESSIONS

According to *Merriam-Webster*, microaggression is defined as "a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority)." Microaggressions are evident in schools throughout the United States and subtly marginalize

Discrimination

Discrimination affecting people who are considered because of social prejudices, such as a carrier of negative characteristics, example disabled people, members of religious and ethnic minorities but also women and the elderly.

groups of students and families in our buildings.

The mispronunciation of a student's name or creating a nickname that is easier to pronounce...

Assignments that require resources that some students may not have access to...

Referring to a student by their race, or other categorical indicator...

Requesting that a student of a certain racial group speak on behalf of their group as a specialist...

Creating school policies that only benefit one type of student and family...

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Even the highest performing student can be harmed by the subtle nuances of a classroom climate or a building with policies that contribute to a culture of microaggression.

3. DISREGARD OF STUDENTS WHO EXHIBIT PATTERNS OF ACADEMIC FAILURE

The student who fails and drops out might not have a “helicopter parent” who keeps the school staff on their toes so that their child can be successful. The student most likely started out with low grades, was probably spoken to a few times and perhaps the parent was called in, but the interventions stopped there... Why? Because there was no accountability. Unsuspectingly, the school culture promoted the perception that “kids like that” cannot make it, since they are too far behind. Occasionally, a school may go further to uncover possible reasons why the student has difficulty but then the school falls short of properly supporting the student and their family. It is most probable that the needs of this particular student originated when they were unsuccessful at mastering reading at the primary grade level. Thus, the deficits continued to grow as they aged. Schools must empower their teachers to be active members of inquiry teams, align failing students with targeted instruction and resources to help them achieve, and create processes for acute interventions.

4. FAILING TO IMPLEMENT CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

In the 12-plus years that a student of color is educated in our schools, they probably encounter a handful of characters and people in their learning journey who look like them. The effect of this is damaging to their identity, their feelings of belonging, and their feelings of being valued. For students who are most sensitive to this phenomenon of a lack of representation and relevance, there grows an aversion to the content being taught and school as a whole. A growing ache and boredom that cannot be rescued by some of the most dynamic and engaging of educators emerges. Although there have been countless advances and developments concerning culturally responsive literature and pedagogy, the number of educators who make this a reality in their classrooms and schools is slight.

5. AVOIDING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

When everything is swept under the rug, the house is never truly clean. Instead, there remains a festering pile that is never attended to. When districts and schools avoid difficult conversations around race, they shortchange themselves by not delving into the issues that surface – issues that could ultimately lead them to new learning, healing, and planning for future successes. Ultimately, when backs are turned and the issues remain, students suffer. Difficult and courageous conversations help teams peel back the layers of misunderstanding and biases that we all possess. However, there is a place and time for such conversations, and planning and forethought are required for support structures and resources needed to guide educators.

CONCLUSION

Cultural proficiency is at the heart of equity. Culturally proficient districts and schools are better able to create equitable systems and strategies to support all learners. In a study conducted by Wright & Harris (2010), “findings suggested that superintendents who recognize the importance of cultural proficiency and declare their willingness to lead the district through necessary focused change to address cultural proficiency, lead their districts to reduce the achievement gap” (p. 220).

After years of educating students and families the same way, it appears difficult to modify our practices at all levels of schooling. Education is the conduit that prepares the future workforce, a workforce that in 2030 will consist of more than 50 percent people of color. If in our school communities we are not willing to take risks to break the old mold of what has been, we will hurt our collective country and ourselves by not ensuring that each child is given an equitable opportunity to succeed.

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Culturally Responsive Environments

Include All Staff



By Kristen Lennon-McMahan

"Sometimes it only takes a single teacher to turn a child's life around. Some students will come to school today because of that teacher. Be that teacher."
– unknown

This quote plays over and over in my head almost daily. However, as leaders, we need to also make sure we focus on the relationships between our students and support staff as well. These are the educational professionals who greet our students off the bus in the morning, in the hallways, offices, cafeteria, study halls, testing rooms, athletic events, etc. They too have the power to be the reason a student will want to come to school each day.

As a building leader, I have really tried to focus on providing support staff with professional development related to building and maintaining cultural responsiveness in our interactions with our ever-changing student population.

AT THE BUILDING LEVEL:

As an assistant principal in a high school building that houses ninth graders (approximately 805 this school year), I introduced the grade nine monitors to the “day of dialogue” that is held with high school students two to three times annually. Two monitors then participated in “the day” with students. The Day of Dialogue was originally created by two colleagues in my district. I looked at the presentation and used activities that I felt would appropriately introduce this idea to my staff.

Monitors were exposed to:

1. **Idea: Everyone has a culture – everyone is different.** We discussed how it feels to be part of a culture, how many cultures were represented in our group, and how they might be different now if they belonged to a different culture. We also discussed the basic needs every culture shares.
2. **Diversity Map:** Using a piece of construction paper, the monitors identified the types of diversity seen in our school, where new students would see these differences, and what a new student would see.
3. Lastly, they **developed a symbol** they felt would represent our entire school and all of its diversity. Each group explained the reasoning behind their symbol and how they felt it represented our school.

AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL:

After providing my building level monitors with professional development on cultural responsiveness and receiving very positive feedback, I joined a sub-committee at the dis-

trict level to look at ways to provide similar PD on a much larger scale, districtwide, at our superintendent’s conference day. As a group, we decided on some activities that we felt would work with a large group training (K-12 support staff). The activities were taken from a previous training developed by colleagues for teachers/administrators and then revised to meet the needs of the support staff. From here, I was responsible for providing turnkey training to the trainers. I trained 41 facilitators and ended up assigning 35 of them to then train 414 support staff in smaller groups.

The goals of the session were to:

- Recognize how our own culture shapes our thinking
- Gain an understanding and appreciation of the cultural proficiency continuum through discussions with colleagues
- Commit to engage in the learning journey to better meet the needs of all our students.

Support staff was introduced to:

1. **Iceberg Concept – “Power of Culture”:** Most aspects about a person’s culture are not so obvious and are hidden below the water’s surface. Participants discussed that many people get stuck at the tip of the iceberg. They assume they know someone based on what they see on the outside. We need to look “below the surface” to truly understand someone. We then transitioned to other activities by explaining that we are going to help each other do this by sharing some of the less obvious aspects of our culture with each other.
2. **Stereotypes – Discussion:** In our district, we interact in many different ways (student to student, staff to student, staff to staff, etc.). How do our interactions reveal

our own cultural awareness? While we know our own characteristics of culture, what do others actually see in us?

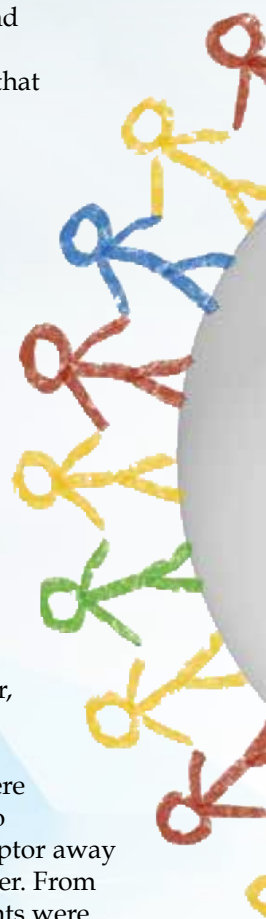
3. Power of Culture and Circles of My Multicultural Self (Interactive Activities):

Participants looked at the “wheel of culture.” They were then asked to examine the various components of culture (this wheel is just a sample, just like the iceberg was) and identify a few characteristics that defined their identity. On another handout, participants were asked to write down four descriptors that were “circles of my multicultural self.”

Examples of descriptors were middle-aged white woman, mother, professional, middle class. Participants were then directed to take one descriptor away and then another. From here, participants were invited to turn to another person, share their original four, and talk about why they selected the two descriptors they took away.

Participants discussed the following questions:

- How did it feel to take away some elements of your identity?
- How challenging was it to take away two pieces of your identity?
- How do you think our students feel when they



enter our doors and have to leave a piece of themselves outside?

4. **Introduction to Cultural Proficiency Continuum:** Participants were given a color copy of the continuum. It was introduced to raise an awareness about cultural

cultural competence, and cultural proficiency.

Participants were then asked to react to the first three points of the continuum (left side) and to the next three points (right side).

“One person can make a difference. Everyone should try.”

– John F. Kennedy

5. Debriefing Questions:

- What did you learn about yourself and/or your school in doing this session?
- How will you know you are making a positive difference for your students?
- What is one thing that you will change in your practice as you interact with students?
- What are some ways you will continue your own learning?

“One person can make a difference. Everyone should try,” John F. Kennedy commented. As our student populations change, we need to focus on building positive relationships with all adults our students interact with. We, as administrators and leaders for this change, need to remember our support staff also has the ability to influence the life of a child. In recognizing that, we also need to ensure we provide our support staff with the tools to address the ever changing needs of our students. As we improve these relationships and interactions, it is our hope that more and more students, especially those who need us the most, will then come to school because of the supportive adults in their building.



proficiency. Participants were asked to review the six stages on the cultural proficiency continuum (from left to right) and give examples of each (verbally) after they reviewed it. These included cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence,

Facilitators then followed a script and read the following: “Everyone falls somewhere on this continuum. Wherever you fall is OK; there is no right or wrong answer. We want everyone to know that being on the left of the continuum does not make you a bad person. We want you to begin thinking about your practice and interactions when engaging with students. In your mind, determine how can you, in your practice, begin to move right on this continuum?”

KRISTEN M. LENNON-MCMAHAN, is the class assistant principal at Shenendehowa High School West.



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Using “Windows and Mirrors”
to Open Doors:

A Reflection on Implementing SEED

(Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity)



By Kelly B. Weisharr

The Fairport Central School District is a suburban district of about 5,800 students located ten miles southeast of Rochester, NY. The demographics of the district have shifted in recent years, with a rise in students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch and a growing percentage of students of color and English language learners (ELLs). The district’s culture is centered around love, family, community, and the idea that “once a Raider, always a Raider.”

The district remains largely white (86 percent). The recent demographic shifts left many educators searching for better ways to connect with and support students with diverse backgrounds and different life experiences than their own. During the 2014-2015 school year a small group of educators researched and proposed that Fairport send people to be trained through the National SEED Project (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity).

As the website describes, "The National SEED Project is a peer-led professional development program that creates conversational communities to drive personal, organizational, and societal change toward greater equity and diversity....Through this methodology, SEED equips us to connect our lives to one another and to society at large by acknowledging systems of oppression, power, and privilege."

Fairport held its first SEED seminars during the 2015-2016 school year. Three high school educators

were trained through the National SEED Project during the summer of 2015 to come back and facilitate local seminars. The first SEED group consisted of 13 teachers. Participants met three hours a month for the duration of the school year. They covered topics such as race, gender, orientation, socioeconomic status and class, mental health, learning differences, and linguistic differences.

As SEED facilitators were trained to do, each seminar consisted of experiential learning, personal testimony, and a "systems" perspective. Participants engaged with texts, articles, videos, art, active learning opportunities, and each other to "do their own work" and better understand how privilege and oppression impact teaching and learning. They learned about a key concept in SEED called "windows and mirrors." Emily Style, founding codirector of SEED, describes curriculum as needing "to function both as window and as mirror, in order to reflect and reveal

most accurately both a multicultural world and the student herself or himself" (Curriculum As Window and Mirror, by Emily Style, *Social Science Record*, Fall, 1996. First published in *Listening for All Voices*, Oak Knoll School monograph, Summit, NJ, 1988).

A majority of the first seminar group participants readily engaged with SEED work. Many reported feeling energized and motivated to make change. What was unanticipated, and unplanned, was that over the course of the 2015-2016 school year SEED work spread out beyond the seminars and opened up other ways to engage in social justice work. There was a flood of new opportunities, for both students and staff. New and unexpected "doors" were flung open wide.

A local organization heard that Fairport was bringing in SEED and approached the district to consider joining a collaboration to show the film *I'm Not Racist...Am I?* (Point Made Films). Fairport embraced



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the project and trained over ten facilitators to lead discussions on race after the film. The film was shown to staff, students, and community members. Showing the film led to an invitation for Fairport students to do a school exchange with a Rochester City School. Students were paired up and visited each other's school buildings. After the experience they debriefed about differences between urban schooling and suburban schooling. Fairport students were then invited to a countywide student summit on race. As students delved deeper into issues of race, they identified a need for a diversity club. They returned to Fairport High School and created DREAM (Demonstrate Racial Equality for All Mankind).

The 2015-2016 school year can only be described as an "explosion" of equity work and social justice conversations. Although schools are typically systems that move and change slowly, SEED appeared to have opened doors to all sorts of new experiences and activities. Although only 13 people participated directly in the SEED seminars, countless other educators and students were drawn into social justice activities over the course of the year.

Fairport continued to train SEED leaders over the next two years. In total there are nine trained SEED leaders in the district (one high school administrator, two high school educators, two middle school educators, and four elementary educators). During the 2016-2017 school year 43 more teachers participated in SEED seminars. During the 2017-2018 school year 53 more new teachers joined. This year, 2018-2019, the SEED seminar offerings were expanded to include paraprofessionals and office professionals, which allowed for 80 new SEED participants. In addition to these professional development offerings, SEED leaders have also designed opportunities for educators to continue SEED work beyond the first year of SEED. By the end of this school year almost 200 educators will have participated in SEED seminars.

Numerous SEED participants

have been vocal about their experiences. One middle school principal reports that he frequently hears about the work done in SEED during evaluation discussions. As a result of these types of conversations, several Fairport administrators reached out to SEED leaders and requested that some foundational SEED concepts and discussions (like "windows and mirrors") be incorporated into faculty meetings. Yet again, another door was opened to allow equity work to be done in larger settings with the potential to engage whole school buildings.

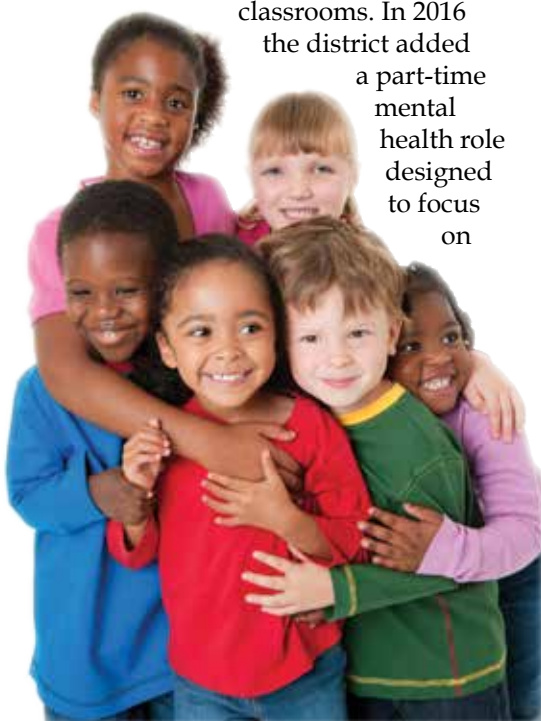
Growth and systemic change throughout Fairport have continued. While SEED is somewhat organic and "bottom up" in that teachers were the driving force behind bringing it to Fairport, none of the work that has been done could have been accomplished without the support of the superintendent, the board of education, and other district/building administrators. Due to their passion to address the needs of all students, concepts of equity and access have been woven into Fairport's belief statements, strategic planning, and district initiatives. They supported and nurtured SEED (and all the other "open doors") from the beginning.

Fairport continues to look at ways to move SEED work from the seminar rooms into the classrooms. In 2016 the district added a part-time mental health role designed to focus on

the needs of economically challenged students and families. The district is currently in the process of looking more closely at data (academic achievement, discipline) to determine if there are any gaps in performance between various demographic groups. This summer a group of educators, administrators, and board members attended a conference on culturally and linguistically responsive educational practices (CLR, Dr. Sharroky Hollie). There is discussion of reviewing the code of conduct with an "equity lens" and moving toward restorative practices/discipline as a way to keep students connected to the school community. Currently the district is working with a doctoral intern to do a formal program evaluation of SEED and to quantify the impact that the program has had on Fairport teacher beliefs and classroom practices. The DREAM club has continued, as has participation in Roc2Change (the countywide student summit on race). Other professional development opportunities, outside of the SEED seminar format, have been created to allow staff to dive deeper into topics related to race, poverty, and gender.

So, while SEED teaches us about "windows and mirrors," it also has opened new "doors" for the students and staff in the Fairport Central School District. Although SEED has only been in Fairport for four years, the amount of change and growth it has directly and indirectly brought about is remarkable. SEED's impact appears to go well beyond what takes place during monthly seminars. We are encouraged by our progress thus far and excited for what the future will bring.

For more information on implementing the National SEED Project in your district, please visit the website at <https://www.nationalseedproject.org/about-us>.



KELLY B. WEISHAAR, is the title 1 student, parent, and community access liaison, and school psychologist at Brooks Hill School in the Fairport CSD.



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Reevaluating the American
Traditions of White School Staff
and Diverse Families to Prevent

Mass Migrations out of Public Schooling



By Clifford Bird and
Dr. Daphne Chandler

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (Musu-Gillette, 2017), the overall percentage of students enrolled in the nation's public schools, both traditional district buildings and charter, increased from 48.5 million to 50 million between the fall of 2003 and fall of 2013. This growth is projected to continue at least for the next seven years into 2025. In many ways, this is evidence of the promise of diversity and democracy that makes the United States of America great. Sadly, however, that promise remains just that – a remote assurance of greatness yet to come, but not yet a reality.

In actuality, a closer analysis of national trends reveals massive migrations away from public schools that should concern us. Specifically, European American children were equally split, representing 50 percent of private school enrollment and 50 percent of public, at the start of the 2013 academic year. This represented a marked percentage change from 59 percent in public school just ten years earlier in 2003. African American students, while not nearly as “privileged” with private school access (Collins, 2018), also saw a decrease in public school enrollments from 2003 to 2013. Their enrollment representation dropped from 17 percent to 16 percent in public schools (Musu-Gillette, 2017). On the contrary, Spanish-speaking or Hispanic students saw a six percentage point increase in public school enrollment, from 19 percent to 25 percent, and Asian/Pacific Islander children a one point increase, from 4 percent to 5 percent. Should school leaders especially be taking this move by parents around the country personally? Should school leaders and parents in public schools be having conversations that restore a collective allegiance to making America great together? We say, yes. At least two important questions for school leaders and parents to consider arise:

1. What becomes of our country if half of our children are taught that they must segregate and privatize their thinking and successes in order to be successful Americans rather than sharing them with their neighbors?
2. What gains are there to be made for us in the decades to come if we took to heart the actions of millions of white and black families to enroll their children in private schools as a call to collective action to enhance the ways that all families are being served in our schools? We write as a principal and parent duo dedicated to the American dream of every person having the opportunity to reach their fullest potential for the best life possible – from their

doorsteps, and in their neighborhoods and communities.

Despite being of different race ethnicities, and despite occupying different positions as power brokers within the education system, we have made the conscious decision to share the same mission and reality in our local school community as the first and most critical step toward meeting the demands of (1) cultural responsiveness, (2) equitable access to resources and opportunities, (3) restorative justice, and (4) social responsibility for our diverse families and friends. For principal Bird, a veteran leader of 29 years in upstate New York, leadership and systemwide efficacy have meant raising his personal awareness as a school leader in an America that continues to evolve in cultural exchanges and sociopolitical views with yet another presidential election looming on the horizon in 2020.

LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS, FOR “WOKE” SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP

As an old(er) white male administrator, I have been playing with the term “woke.” I am certainly not woke, but I am waking, bleary-eyed. There are two major touchstones that I can point to that nudged me into the dawn. The first came during the last school year when I was asked to allow a doctoral student to interview me. Her thesis was looking at cultural proficiency, student engagement, and achievement for minority students in upstate New York. This was going to be easy. All my ESL (I was thinking multicultural) students are bused to another building. I expected a ten-minute interview, tops. But then the questions honed in on the cultures that are present here at Abram Lansing School – my black and Hispanic families. Reading the transcript now, I consistently said that the families were always welcome in my school. My school. When I did slip and use the word “our,” it was including all the white faculty and staff. Never once did I mean to include school families in the “our.” Slowly, as I ruminated on what I should do to make a change and welcome all my parents, I hit a panicked stage. How could I really cause change? How do

I let my families of color know that I was having an existential change in thinking? That they should suddenly trust me, just because, well, I’m me?

The second was a multipart reaction to our administrative team’s reading Glenn Singleton’s book, *Courageous Conversations about Race*. First, I asked why we were reading this; I have very few students of color. My assistant superintendent begged to differ. Had I not seen the numbers?

And then I opened my eyes – amazing, really. Suddenly I noticed the multitude of skin shades in my hallways, and I realized that I was really not like them. But more than that, I had to realize how unfair it was that so many of them were not like us. They were little strangers in a strange land, a place where no one in charge looks like them. How hard that must be. (For those who need numbers, 29.26 percent of my students do not consider themselves white.) And we were doing nothing to even recognize the difference. I was not colorblind, I was color-ignorant. Nearly three in ten of my students, 139, are coming every day to a world that doesn’t look like theirs.

But now what do I do? Being awake does not cause change. It is from this basis that my repertoire of strategies for effective school leadership is evolving, fast.

PARENT POWER, FOR THOSE WHO LOATHE “THE AUTHORITIES”

As a working mom dedicated to the efficacy of the elementary school that my kindergartner and only child attends under Mr. Bird’s watchful eye, I struggle with the navigation of our family’s African heritage and African American culture in a school community coasting comfortably in a sea of valorized whiteness. All of the teachers at Abram Lansing are white. Perhaps more importantly, white is the style and content of pedagogy, from celebrated holidays to historical figures in U.S. and world history. But we are not white. In many ways, we are the antithesis of white history and culture, the forced laborers and economic boons to the prized developers and economy managers. It’s little wonder that we still find



ourselves missing in public school staff and curriculum. My struggle is real.

So real is my struggle that in the mere two years that my daughter has been of chronological and developmental age for school, she first attended homeschooling, followed by private Montessori as primary and secondary options, respectively, leaving public school in the unwanted third place. I am one of those “migratory” parents spoken of in the NCES report earlier. With a Ph.D. in educational psychology, having worked as a school psychologist and later a professor in Africana studies, I know the numbers associated with the system’s failure to teach and reach all students. I know the sordid and contiguous U.S. history of racism and bigotry, of white denial, and the empty rhetoric of democratization. So, what the heck is my kid doing in public school? How do I expect a positive outcome for my little girl?

There are many parents bearing the same struggle as me. We often find ourselves at the mercy of authorities who do not represent us: police and other law authorities, immigration authorities, housing and social service authorities, and in schools, educational authorities. Intentionally or unintentionally, our public schools represent a leg of “the system,” chalked with the authority for systemic good use, or systematic misuse and abuse. Like the “thought police” of Orwell’s 1984, educators wield power over the precious minds of our children for hours a day. When their authority is misused, then schools are merely

the places where black and other nonwhite children go to die as cultural agents and independent thinkers.

Naturally, many of us non-white parents try hard to distance ourselves from all parts of the system (even when our children are a part of it). Instead of being a part of our children’s school community, we bear it. Their school experience is just one more part of the struggle.

Rather than reaching a resolution, however, what we get through our distancing is a dissolution – of an opportunity to give our children what they deserve, now and in the future. It is from this basis that my repertoire of tools for helping to ensure effective (and free!) education for my child and yours is evolving.

FROM REEVALUATION TO RE-VAMPING:

- Collaborate with willing parents and diversity professionals to devise a survey assessing how welcomed parents feel in the school, culturally and academically. (The questions must be challenging, and though the answers might be unnerving, remember that seeing the school through their eyes is key.)
- From the survey, plan a town hall style discussion with the intent of taking action tailor-made for the school. This meeting also shows why the survey is important and how it is being used. (Here a committee might be useful.)
- Next, meet with teachers and fellow school leaders to “map” the parent data onto current school and district strategies, some of which may be kept as is or adjusted. (For instance, along with several other administrators, I greet each child outside of our building as they walk to school or exit their family cars at least once a week, and this we will keep! Our professional development activities, on the other hand, may be better focused and adjusted.)
- Show a willingness to change.

This includes not only school leaders, but teachers and parents as well because we all play a part in the school experience and decision to stay. (Consider written oaths or contracts.)

- Parents, especially nonwhite, will be encouraged on a weekly basis to actively participate in changing our school conversations and curricula content (utilizing homework folders and morning greetings for invitations and reminders).
- Encourage diverse parent volunteering at school events and classroom activities, including co-teaching regular or special topics. (Establish an organized system to determine who is and is not participating and let no parent off the hook!)

CONCLUSION

Getting in front of some concerning national school trends such as those listed above requires sharing with one another as a collective school community first, and with other school leaders, teachers, and parents as well. What we’ve shared here represents a few of our most cherished thoughts and strategies for addressing what research has repeatedly shown to be necessary components of effective, quality education in our country; in three words: diversity, mindfulness, and inclusivity. We welcome feedback and dialogue from your neighborhood.

CLIFFORD BIRD, is the principal at Abram Lansing Elementary School in Cohoes City School District.

DR. DAPHNE CHANDLER is a parent in the Cohoes City School District.



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2019

Call FOR Submissions

SAANYS is the official state affiliate to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and their annual awards programs.

SAANYS/NASSP Assistant Principal Award

This program annually recognizes outstanding middle level and high school assistant principals who have succeeded in providing high-quality learning opportunities for students. These assistant principals are acknowledged by their peers for the exemplary contributions they have made to the profession. From these state winners, three finalists are named, and the NASSP National Assistant Principal of the Year is selected from among the finalists.

(Deadline for this particular award is Nov. 10)

SAANYS/NASSP Principal of the Year Award

The NASSP National Principal of the Year program recognizes outstanding middle level and high school principals who have succeeded in providing high-quality learning opportunities for students as well as demonstrating exemplary contributions to the profession. NASSP honors all State Principals of the Year at the Principal's Institute held each year in Washington, D.C. From these state winners, three finalists are named as contenders for the National Principal of the Year award.

SAANYS/NAESP Assistant Principal Award

This program promotes educational excellence for pre-kindergarten through eighth grade (PreK-8) schooling and calls attention to the fundamental importance of the assistant principal. NAESP will share their successes and best practices in a practical document for other principals to utilize.

SAANYS/NAESP Elementary School Principal Award and SAANYS/NAESP Middle School Principal Award

These awards are given annually to members of SAANYS and NAESP who have distinguished themselves as an **elementary school principal** or a **middle school principal**. Criteria for these awards:

- The nominee sets the pace, character, and quality of education for the children in the school.
- The nominee is a practicing principal who is committed to excellence.
- The nominee has made a commitment to parents and community.

**JAN
2**

Application Deadline

For additional information contact

Susan Jaronski at: sjaronski@saanys.org.



For full criteria and nomination form, visit: <https://saanys.org/about-us/awards/nomination/>



2019 Call FOR Submissions

JAN
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Application Deadline

Leader in Digital Education Award

This award recognizes a SAANYS member who has demonstrated exceptional, creative leadership in harnessing the potential of technology to further teaching and student achievement. The candidate will have demonstrated excellent organizational and communication skills in supporting and promoting such innovative digital practices for his/her learning community.

Outstanding Educator Award

This award is given annually to a SAANYS member who has made outstanding contributions in New York State schools. Potential criteria include: outstanding leadership in public education; exemplary service to professional organizations; and/or noteworthy writing and/or research in the field of education. Recognition of SAANYS members of various roles, responsibilities, and titles is encouraged.

Leadership and Support Award

The SAANYS Leadership and Support Award was established to recognize the outstanding leadership efforts of those members whose responsibilities require leadership through support services to fellow administrators across and between buildings and districts. Such administrators may be employed by BOCES or in other cooperative efforts. These positions include non-instructional and support positions that promote and encourage collaboration among multiple buildings and/or districts.

Irving Schwartz (Retiree)

Irving Schwartz was one of the founding members of SAANYS. As an NASSP coordinator, he served on the SAANYS Board of Directors through 1994. This award is given to a SAANYS member who, in retirement, has made significant contributions to the welfare of the association, public education, and/or the greater community.

K-12 Building Principal Award

This award is in recognition of the unique characteristics of a K-12 building and the related demands, expectations, and challenges of a principal in this multilevel environment. It is given to a SAANYS member who is a successful K-12 principal and recognized educational leader who has been a practicing administrator for at least three years.

Friend of Education Award

This award was established to honor an individual who, or a group or organization that, has contributed to the general support and advancement of outstanding public school education in New York State.

This individual, group, or organization:

- Is not a professional educator or educational organization within the K-12 NYS public school system.
- Has contributed to the support and advancement of outstanding public school education in a way that extends to the broadest number of students in one or more of SAANYS' regions.
- Has been a role model for educators by consistently demonstrating a belief in the importance and value of a public school education.
- Has made these contributions over an extended period.



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