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Loudoun County School Board, Equity Committee Meeting, Thursday, April 4, 2024

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Place Loudoun County Public Schools / School Board meeting (see BoardDocs / LCPS-TV)
Length 1h 44m (video)

- Official meeting video (Vimeo / LCPS-TV): <https://player.vimeo.com/video/930895354?rel=0>
- BoardDocs (School Board): <https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/loudoun/Board.nsf/Public>

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Speech-to-text: whisper.cpp, model large-v3-turbo. Produced 2026-10-21. Each paragraph starts with its time [HH:MM:SS] in the meeting video.

[00:00:27] Good afternoon. We are calling this second equity committee meeting to order. Check my time, Helen. I would like to share with you that there are three school board members who are assigned to this committee.

[00:00:54] One, Aubyn, is sick, and I told him don't come anywhere near me. And the other one is Dina Griffith, and she is in North Carolina visiting a sick family member. So since we're not voting on anything tonight, we can move forward without their presence.

[00:01:17] However, I'd like to share with you that sometimes I attend other committee meetings to give support. And tonight I have Ms. April Chandler here tonight to give me support in my committee meeting.

[00:01:34] So she is a school board member. I want to thank Dr. Letitia Ellis-Williams and her assistant, Helen Randolph, for getting everything ready for us today, the room and the paperwork.

[00:01:54] So let's give them a hand as well. And Dr. Ellis-Williams' entire committee supports her, and it makes me feel good because I know I got her plus her team.

[00:02:13] So welcome, welcome. For attendance purposes, I think Jory was in the hallway getting you to sign in. And we'd like for you to sign in, if you will, because in past years, there have been individuals who said that they attended.

[00:02:37] Yes, I did. I was there. So this year, we're going to have you sign in to make sure that you are here so that I don't have to fight with Dr. Ellis Williams on who was here. That's a ha-ha, Dr. Williams. So Jory Jonette is in the hallway, and each of you I have called, if I had your number, over this past month since our last meeting.

[00:03:05] And I said, I'll call you back because I don't know what number to give you. If you would like to take this number down, this is a number where you can reach me and leave a message if I'm not there. But I didn't know the number at that time.

[00:03:21] That number is 571-252-1212. And if you leave a message on, that's my desk phone here in the administration building.

[00:03:37] And if you leave a message, give me 24 hours, and I promise I'll get back to you. At this time, we will have public comment, and we only have one person signed up for public comment.

[00:03:53] And because she is my friend, I don't think I have to read that whole page of stuff about public comment. I'm just going to give Andrea the opportunity to give us public comment. But please listen to her closely because she's always here and she's always supportive.

[00:04:13] Good evening. Yes, I think I could recite that. Is that me, the feedback? We good? Okay. First, the presentations for 5.01 and 5.02 are the same in the agenda.

[00:04:29] Last meeting, you were shown a typical day in the life of an equity lead, but that lead was Laura Freeman. Tonight, you are hearing from Nikki Deal about how school's school principals center equity.

[00:04:47] I would ask her to do that, too. Nikki is an amazing person and leader, and she truly has a heart for students. Don't just ask her questions about her school. You need to be asking LCPS questions about other schools.

[00:05:08] If you wanted to know what was happening in my classroom, there are specific students I would point you to. You are being pointed to specific people. Make sure you ask questions of who is not speaking.

[00:05:26] Equity needs to be in all of our schools. We need to move at the speed of the child who needs it the most, not at the speed of the adults who can't handle it, who don't know what to do.

[00:05:44] They don't get to tell us how fast to move. We have to move at the speed of the children who need us. Finally, Policy 8040, the committee has asked LCPS to survey the community about transgender students.

[00:06:01] The existence of people is not up for debate. This committee should be the conscience of LCPS. Thank you very much. I'll be here all night. No, this committee should be the conscience of LCPS.

[00:06:20] We should not be debating whether or not transgender children have rights. And this committee needs to do its role and make sure the school board knows that is not how children are treated in LCPS.

[00:06:40] Thank you, Black Lives Matter. Generally, at this time, we would look at and approve the minutes from the last meeting.

[00:06:58] However, since the other two school board members are not here, we are not going to look at the minutes from the last meeting. Next meeting, we'll have to approve two sets of minutes. But you will

get the minutes, but we will not vote on them tonight because the other two school board members are not here.

[00:07:19] And according to our policy, that is what we should do. When you entered, you were given a yellow sheet of paper by Jory Jonette out in the hallway.

[00:07:38] And on that yellow sheet of paper, we're asking for you to list what you as an individual feel is your top three priorities for this school term and for next school term related to the equity committee.

[00:07:53] The reason we're asking for that is because I'm also going to ask the school board, the full school board, to grant us permission to maintain this committee as it is now for two years so that we will have consistency in actions and we can see the results of our labor.

[00:08:14] I talked with Dr. Smith about it, and he said that that could be done. So generally, the committee serves from January to December of a calendar year, but I'm asking that it will serve from January to December of 2024 as well as 2025.

[00:08:37] And that is going to be my ask, and I am going to let you know the results of the full board And if some of you cannot serve the full two years, if you let me know, we will find someone in your area or get another nomination from your organization to replace you.

[00:08:59] So don't feel committed because I'm asking for two years, but in order for consistency and in order for you to be able to reflect and see the work that you've done, I think two years will give you that opportunity. So that yellow sheet is in front of you.

[00:09:16] We do not want it to leave the room with you. We'd like for you to turn it in at the end of this program. So not to take time or your attention away from any of the presenters, but as they pause, possibly you can write and share and leave that with us.

[00:09:37] It will definitely take each of us individually and all of us collectively to lift the heavy load of equity in Loudoun County Public Schools. So while tonight we have some clear examples, as presentations, I would like to be able to toss that challenge that they've taken and succeeded with to each of you to help us lift the heavy load of equity.

[00:10:07] So at this time, I'm going to ask Dr. Williams, Ellis Williams, if she will come forward and introduce the presenters.

[00:10:25] Testing. Thank you, Dr. Deans, and thank you for public comments referencing that we want to have a semblance of fidelity of the equity-oriented change agents you see before you this evening.

[00:10:41] Good evening, and welcome to all of our committee members and guests. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the following school-based equity-oriented change agent leaders. In case you didn't know, that's your name. With us tonight, we have Broad Run High School, David Spage, Mahalit Abdallah, Freedom High School, Joan Lewis Osborne, Goshen Post Elementary School, Brian Klippel and Krishana Goins, Mercer Middle School, Nikesha Deal, Richard Donets and Marcus Stevenson, Potomac Elementary School, Caitlin Cooch and Mark Hayden. As a reminder to all

[00:11:21] stakeholders assembled, an equity-oriented change agent possesses the following attributes as you remember from our last gathering. They are, and exemplify the persona to have an equity attitude. They avoid demonizations. They initiate courageous conversations. They demonstrate persistence.

[00:11:42] They remain calm and committed and patient. They maintain an asset attitude. And lastly, they maintain a coherent focus. The school-based leadership teams invited this evening embody the tenants of an equity oriented change agent and we are excited to hear from them all of them share their equity centered work in their respective school buildings and collectively within the community of lcps so at this time i'd like to invite a broad-run high school and if you choose

[00:12:15] to speak from your seats just turn on your microphones thank you thank you uh dr ellis liams um i asked my my colleague do we want to go up or speak we're gonna speak from here that's okay. I'm Dave Spage, and I'm joined by teacher extraordinaire from Broadner High School, Ms. Mahalo Abdallah. I have the pleasure of serving as principal. Ms. Abdallah has served as a teacher, an equity lead, has served as a coach, a club sponsor, has served as an honor society sponsor, has served as a class. She's done just about everything you can name in a

[00:12:55] comprehensive high school. And so I'm going to let her talk mostly this evening about some of the things that we're doing in partnership and equity initiatives that we've been doing recently at Broad Run High School. But we talked a little bit yesterday, and I was just going to frame a couple things. And thank you, Dr. Ellis Williams, for saying about that coherent approach. Because as a principal, that's something that you want your equity work to start with, is that coherent approach. And so I wanted to talk just a little bit about some things that I looked for in my message supporting our equity work, supporting Ms. Abdallah also in her role as equity lead.

[00:13:29] So I went to some different literature and found a book called Everyday Anti-Racism. And Dr. Deans, I brought you a copy because you know how I like to bring you copies of all my books. And so I got a copy for you. And it's a series of brief articles about equity work.

[00:13:46] And I found an article in this book, which I brought copies of, and I'll provide for staff if you want a copy. And it's an article by a gentleman by the name of Joshua Aronson. And Joshua Ronson, at least at the time I read it, used to be a professor of equity studies at New York University.

[00:14:05] And one of the things I like about the article, and it's titled, Knowing Students as Individuals, which I'm just going to pause there for a second and say, knowing our students as individuals, I think is the 21st century model of where we're going in education, right? We're built in an industrial age model, you know, where it's sort of mass education, but we're seeing that the 21st century and moving forward, we really need to think about personalization, individualization.

[00:14:28] knowing them as individuals. So Dr. Aronson talks in this article about two main things, and I liked it as a principle because they're really just simple, if I might say, behaviors that we can do on a daily basis as educators, as a community, to promote equity, to move the needle, so to speak, for all of our students. And so he talks about two main behaviors, and those behaviors are genuine curiosity and self-awareness. And he talks a little bit about, you know, how important it is to be genuinely curious about your students in your classroom. And that how that,

[00:15:06] and I'm going to go ahead and reference back to goal number one of our mission statement in Loudoun County Public Schools 1.3, prioritizing care for students by ensuring a safe and affirming environment. Genuine curiosity can lead to safe and affirming environments for all of our students.

[00:15:24] And also, Dr. Aronson talks about self-awareness. And I think we all would agree just how important it is for all of us to be aware of how we're coming across with our students, of how we're coming

across with each other in our daily work, be that with equity work or anything else we're doing in the school.

[00:15:40] So having said that, those are some two main sort of pillars and behaviors that we've been talking about as a school. And I'll let Ms. Abdala share some of our specific initiatives and how she's used those also with the training that she provides the school. Hello.

[00:15:59] So like Dave was saying, we have been working together on this for quite some time. This is my 13th year in Loudoun County Public Schools, all of them at Broad Run High School. And so when the position first went out, I was so excited. I was like, oh, my gosh, this is me.

[00:16:15] This is what I've been yearning for. And so I filled out the application and I was able to do this. So I've been in this role over the last few years, I think four or five years now. And Dave and I have worked very closely just looking at how can we make Broad Run a more inclusive and safe environment for all.

[00:16:34] And we knew there would be resistance. And for us, we always try to center back on the students. So we are very focused on that student's voice, empowering students, because I can always find middle ground with staff when it comes to students. So instead of looking at specific situations, I just approach it with, are we here for student success? And typically no teacher would tell me no to that. And so that's where we root our conversation. We like to look at what's going on at Broad Run High School and then assess and go from there. And so towards the end of last

[00:17:09] school year, we had noticed a lot of issues. We were doing more restorative practices and students were just using vocabulary that just doesn't belong in the walls of Broad Run High School or any Loudoun County public school. And so I have to give a shout out to Willard because our equity meeting, they presented an idea that they had rolled out. And then I also have to give a shout out to the Mercer Middle School student ambassador because she emailed me and had wanted to partner with Broad Run High School to do a campaign. And in going back and forth, she just

[00:17:46] really gave me this fabulous idea. We never got to partner in it, but I still have to give credit because if it wasn't for her email, I wouldn't have started having this conversation. And so that turned into what we called our think before you speak campaign. And I immediately went to Dave and I was like, this is what I want to do. Like, what are our next steps? And we just kept talking about it. He was like, I love this. What do you want to do? And so that started in February with that meeting. And I knew I wanted to do something during our advisory period, which are those 30 minutes every Wednesday. And so in March, I reached out to all clubs and organizations within the

[00:18:21] Broad Run School to see if they'd be interested in developing a lesson with me. And I was met with so much response that I was so overwhelmed. I was like, oh yeah, I don't have to do this by myself. And so in April, we started meeting with sponsors and their students from these organizations.

[00:18:36] I met with the athletic director to say, how do we get sports involved? And so emails went out to coaches. And so I, you know, put this into our networking that we have for equity leads. But ultimately, Spartan Pride, which is our LGBTQ plus organization, the Asian Student Association, Global Ambassadors, PEER, SCA, the assistant principals at the time created a promo video that went out on the morning announcements, getting all the students excited about the campaign that would begin. My art students created posters that went around the school. Athletics sent me videos, that went into the morning announcements so this really felt amazing because it wasn't just me

[00:19:16] saying this is what we're doing the students could see themselves they saw their teachers they saw their coaches all kind of on the same page they saw their administrators their school counselors and so that was super exciting we did this over two advisories where we had quotes being read during morning announcements or we tackled racial slurs and hate speech and how to respond and how we're not going to be silent and complicit.

[00:19:43] And we ended with a pledge, and that got posted all around the school. We put them into the hearts, or we spelled out T-B-U-I-S, Think Before You Speak. And then I wanted something tangible, and so I was so gracious that we were given some equity funding.

[00:19:59] We bought every student stickers that says, Be a Kind Spartan in our colors, and then every student was gifted a bracelet, a Think Before You Speak bracelet. And so that's something that I still see them wearing. It's on their water bottles, it's on their computers, and it's just something that we kind of say, like, are you being a kind Spartan today, or, you know, have you thought?

[00:20:18] We also dove into intent versus impact, and how sometimes we say things that are what we think is funny, and it's not, and that you're most likely offending someone. But let's have that conversation. It's not about you're in trouble now, or you have to go to see Mr. Spage.

[00:20:34] It's like, let's just talk about this. And I tell teachers, you are empowered by your administrator and by your equity lead to pause your lesson and say, let's talk about that. Let's say, like, what did you mean? And we taught the students, these are the questions that you can ask.

[00:20:49] These are your resources. And most importantly, I got to introduce myself to the entire school because my coworkers knew what I was doing and the work that I was putting in. But the students did not know that my position existed. I was a trusted adult for many, but they didn't know that I had this different purpose.

[00:21:07] that I could serve for them as well. So that was very exciting, which led into this year, the continuation of that. Students have felt comfortable to report incidents to me where I've helped them talk with their teachers. Administration has supported me tremendously throughout this.

[00:21:22] When things need to rise to that level, I can lean on them. And also, I've been working a lot with faculty during several trainings just to let them know, we're here for student success. And when we are self-aware, we can put aside our feelings about this amazing lesson plan that I know you spent so much time working on, but sometimes we have to pause and ask what is going on in this student's life that is hindering their ability to learn today.

[00:21:52] And that's where my focus is all the time, just having these conversations, these very difficult conversations with the staff, and they're getting more on board because we have the support of the administration it's not just me on an island I feel very supported in my monthly meetings that I get to talk with other leads in the network I feel very supported by DEIA we have all of our resources and so all of these things I think have built us for success in a way that we hope to see this change if we want to change our school climate we have to make sure that equity leads are empowered that they're working with their school administrators and that the students

[00:22:32] know that they are loved and that school can be and will be a safe and inclusive place where you can come and learn you can come and make your mistakes and we hope that one way or another that you've learned something that you can then pass along I will leave my final statement with the most

important thing for me when dealing with the faculty is I'm very straightforward with them I'm not here to change your minds about anything about your political beliefs about any of that

[00:23:00] But when you're in these four walls, this is how we're going to behave, and this is what we will do because if you don't want to hear it from me, you're going to hear it from him, and if you don't want to hear it from him, then there's the door, and that's been very clear because we are here to uplift those students, and at the end of the day, that's why we came to teach, right?

[00:23:19] is for them so i've just feel so blessed that uh i'm here to speak on behalf of that that i get to do this work because i get to take my passion for teaching um and show the teachers we've been doing this all along you can have these high expectations and still do the work and it's all together so i could go on and on about equity but i will let the other presenters speak so i'm just very proud of the work we've done at Broad Run, and I know there's still more work to do, so thank you.

[00:24:01] I think I'm supposed to turn this on and show my slides. Do I have to point at something to show my slides? It's over here. It says it's on.

[00:24:35] I only have two. One more. That's good. Thank you. Good evening. My name is Joan Lewis Osborne, and I'm a social studies teacher at Freedom High School. So I'm going to tell you a little bit about myself before I start to talk about my equity work. My family moved here from Minnesota in 2018. My husband's job was purchased by a company out here. His company was purchased and we had to relocate. And as I was, I had

[00:25:11] sent my resume in to several high schools in Loudoun County. And as I was driving out, we were moving. I was on the turnpike with my son who was then in seventh grade. I got a call from Doug Fulton offering me the job at Freedom. And so I had come out thinking, oh, you know, maybe I won't have a job and I'll be like a stay-at-home mom for the first time in my life. But instead I got thrown into a job right away. So I started working at Freedom in about 2019. Doug Fulton asked me if I would be the equity lead. And I was like, I've been here a

[00:25:48] hot minute. Like, I am from Minnesota. I don't know anything about Virginia. I don't know this community. I had a middle schooler. I had a son who was at Rock Ridge at that point, and he was playing cello, and I was driving him a couple times a week into Fairfax for his orchestra, and I was just like, no, I honestly, I can't do this at this point, and you know, and he was very gracious about it. So I continued to work at the school. I was lucky enough to be chosen in 2019 to be one of the teachers across Virginia who taught the African-American history class for the first time.

[00:26:27] And then, you know, everything shut down. We went online and our actual first year of class was taught online. But through teaching that class, through meeting people in the community in the African American community especially, and I will give a shout out to Pastor Michelle Thomas because she really, yes, Ms. Burke, you as well, they really got me grounded in this community, introduced me to the community, my students in African American history do capstones with Pastor Michelle, and so this year, at the end of last school year, Principal

[00:27:06] Chaudry, who had taken over, asked me to be the equity lead, and at that point I felt, okay, I can do it now. I know these people. One of my sons has graduated. He's over at UNC now. I don't have to drive the other one around. He's a senior this year at Independence. So I was ready to take this job. And it's really been a good year so far. So I teach four sections of AP government and politics as well as one section

of African American history. So I'm a working teacher. And I think that that has really helped me in the equity position, especially because I mostly teach juniors and seniors and I teach a lot of kids who are leaders in

[00:27:45] the school and they're in my class and so that's how you hear things that's how you know what's going on so I will step back and say that unfortunately my principal couldn't be here tonight she had to take leave and you know we're all rooting for her and hopefully she'll be back in a couple weeks but she wanted me go ahead and speak about our experience. And so the entire thing began with her.

[00:28:11] Let me try to go to the next slide. Something happened. No, it wasn't that. Okay. The entire effort began with Neelam. So last spring, thank you, there were community listening sessions with the community in South Riding, with the parents, and they were invited with the acting superintendent at the time to Freedom High School to talk about issues in the community.

[00:28:43] And Neelam told me that the African-American parents in particular talked about the fact that their children had been, you know, approached by other children in the school, called racial slurs, bullied, etc. And so that's something she told me at the end of the school year that she would want me to focus on when I became the equity lead.

[00:29:05] So in this past fall, we met and we talked about and ideated and brainstormed about what we could do about this particular issue. But then I said, you know, you were talking to kids and parents last year.

[00:29:21] We want to know what's going on this year. We don't know if these kids have graduated. We want to know what's going on in the school right now. So we did our own sort of mini climate survey. And we actually used a lot of questions from the Virginia Climate Survey.

[00:29:38] And we put it in a Google Doc or in a Google forum because one thing, if you know teenagers, they're not going to answer some super long survey. The one that Virginia gives is super long. Ours was six questions. And we also put a little comment section at the end where they could type in specific things that they wanted to talk about or that it happened.

[00:29:58] So then, because I teach so many of the student leaders, I was able to get them to send the Google survey out to their clubs, their affinity groups, etc. So for instance, the Black Students Association sent it out.

[00:30:16] I also have Excellent Options Advisory, which is an advisory mostly of African American kids. We sent it, the Bright Horizons Advisory, which is Latino children sent it out, the Muslim Students Association, the Afghan Students Association, the Asian Students Association.

[00:30:34] And when I was doing the work and getting the survey together, I discovered that we didn't have an active Latino Students Association anymore. It had sort of stopped during COVID and we didn't have an LGBTQ Students Association.

[00:30:50] So I talked to students in the Latino community that were in my class, in the LGBT community in my class, and I also found out the Jewish students were starting their own organization. So we were able to get the survey out to a lot of different students. And when we got responses back, we saw that, especially among the African-American students, but also among the Muslim students and the Jewish students, that there had been quite a few incidents of racial slurs in the school.

[00:31:20] And so we asked students questions like, where is this happening? And they would say, in the hallways, in study hall, for the most part. But what we also found was that it was happening in friend groups. And they're like, kids will say this in a friend group. One of the Jewish students said, kids will say something in a friend group not even knowing that I'm Jewish.

[00:31:38] And then I'm like, am I supposed to speak up? Or what, like, what should I say? And the African-American student said, kids will say it in their friend groups, thinking, oh, it's okay. People say it in rap songs, et cetera. And so it was really interesting to me to find out that a lot of these incidents weren't directly students confronting other students, saying racial slurs to them.

[00:32:03] It was more of like a casual ha-ha kind of thing that they were doing. So that was kind of eye-opening for us. And after Neelam and I spoke again about this, Then we called in representatives from the DEIA office, which was extremely helpful.

[00:32:20] Everett has been down there several times. Jennifer has been down there several times and met with Neelam when I was teaching and met with all of us. But we decided in the end that we would convene a group of students because we really wanted their input on how we should do this and what we should do.

[00:32:41] So what they came up with was a poster campaign. That was their first idea. And they created these wonderful posters. This was all done by students. The pictures were all taken by a student who's a senior this year. The poster was designed by students.

[00:32:59] They came up with the slogans. We had slogans that we wanted, and they were like, no, kids will never like that. So they came up with their own slogans. And we call it the Eagle in Power, 'cause we're the Freedom Eagles, the Eagle in Power effort.

[00:33:15] And one of their slogans is equality unites, together we soar. They have several different versions of this poster. They have huge ones that actually the PTO donated money for us to print the posters, which was great. And so this was just their starting effort.

[00:33:32] And we said, you know, we need to do more. And they said, yeah, we need to do more. We want students to know who to speak to if they're experiencing this. And so we decided that we would start a trusted adult program. And that was in connection with our UMHT, our Unified Mental Health Team.

[00:33:54] And so our school social worker, Lisa Harris, and another school social worker, Blaise Carland, who does a lot of work with us as far as equity circles and things like that also came in and trained teachers who students had identified as trusted adults.

[00:34:15] And so on the posters, they wanted to put a QR code that students could take their phone, look at the QR code, and find out who the trusted adults were. But also another student had the idea of making stickers that would also be put on teachers' doors or on their laptops.

[00:34:35] And so students would know, you know, who other trusted adults were in the school if they wanted to approach a teacher about an incident that had happened. I would say that the people who were the most helpful in this effort were the equity ambassadors.

[00:34:52] They were amazing. And I wanna give a shout out to Zaina Jamil. She's a junior. I'm so glad she's gonna be back next year. Taran Srikanda and Gabby Cordero. They were our three equity ambassadors and they really took control of this entire effort, and they came up with a lot of the ideas.

[00:35:12] They gave us the names of students who would be in this, and then we were able to get a list of students and get parent permission. And the next thing that they wanted to do was train students to train other students. So we got, along with our head of counseling, we got our freedom ambassadors.

[00:35:31] We got, and they sit in the advisories. We also got a whole group of peer students. We got SCA students, and they were all trained by our school social worker in this whole idea of speaking up when you hear these things, how to speak up, and how to address it in the moment.

[00:35:53] And those were also materials that we got from the DEIA office. So, in our advisories, we have advisory twice a week. In our advisories, over the month of February, all the students in the high school from ninth through 12th grade were trained.

[00:36:11] And the kids also told us, we want to do the training ourselves because advisory teachers do training and we just kind of ignore it. So it would be better if we do it ourselves. And I think it worked. Like we did it in circles with groups of no more than like 10 to 15 kids.

[00:36:28] And the kids did a great job presenting. It was amazing. But this isn't the end. We have another effort that we're doing as well to train students specifically about what is hate speech. Why are people doing this?

[00:36:44] So we have another phase. And actually, it's our school psychologist that's working on that and training students. So it's something that we're going to continue into next year. But I've been really excited by what we've done this year. and I'm really excited to continue it.

[00:36:58] Thank you.

[00:37:30] - So incredibly excited to be here. Thank you so much for having us. We work in middle schools, so we're not gonna stand still. If you've ever worked with middle school students, there's no sitting. So you're gonna see us moving around because that's how we present, and this is how we would present to our staff.

[00:37:45] It's also how we would present to students. No middle school students are gonna sit and listen to us talk. So that's gonna be the difference with us. I do want to start off with some introductions. I am the very proud principal of Mercer Middle School. And like I said, it is my privilege to be here with each of you tonight.

[00:38:03] But it's also my privilege to introduce you to our exceptional equity leads. I'm gonna let them introduce themselves. - Hello, my name is Rich Dinitz. I'm one of the equity leads at Mercer Middle School. I teach seventh grade in history, and I'm very excited to be here.

[00:38:18] So thank you for having us. - And I'm Marcus Stevenson. I am the other equity lead and I teach PE at Mercer. So equity at Mercer, it is something that is our core focus.

[00:38:34] It's very hard to talk from a microphone. I'm like, I want to be out there. It is our core focus, and it always has been. And the way that this began was that we at Mercer have a core motto, one voice, one purpose, one vision, well before it was 1LCPS.

[00:38:50] So that meaning of one is really what embodies our focus on equity. We have taken that motto and we have tailored every single thing that we do at Mercer to align with that motto. So when we say equity at Mercer, we mean as one.

[00:39:07] So we're talking about one voice that is equity. When we're talking about one purpose, our purpose is to make sure that equity is a core focus of what we do, but also that is sustained even after we're not at Mercer. We want that to be something that continues on as part of our footprints that we leave in the school.

[00:39:28] But in addition to that, our vision is to ensure that, you know, we're going to talk a little bit about us being clear about equity because that is what we stand for about equity. But we want our vision to be clear. We want it to have clarity that this is not something that is a checkbox, that it is not something that we do.

[00:39:46] um it is our responsibility to ensure that it is not only a core focus of what we do but it's also a core focus of our school improvement um and so we because um we're going to talk a little about the pillars right now but the pillars are stemmed from our focus in our school improvement plan to ensure that not only are we providing equitable practices in what we do with our students in terms of interaction and relationship, but we're ensuring that that is a part of instruction.

[00:40:16] We're ensuring that it is a part of all of the daily events that take place in our building. So I'm going to turn it over to one of them to talk to you a little bit about the pillars. All right, so when we started this work and Richard and I took over, our big thing was grounding the work. We have a foundation. We have to make a pathway for our staff so that they know what we want to achieve so we can help them achieve it.

[00:40:37] So first, we started off with our five pillars. We like to make it clear. Capacity, listen, empathy, authenticity, and respect. These are all things that are achievable through practice. The first thing you have to do is build the capacity of your staff and the students because everyone thinks, I can't do this. It's not me. I don't want to change my mind. So the capacity has to be the first thing. Once you build the capacity, everything kind of just flows together and can be achieved at their own rates in any order that they choose. So this is a great support system for our staff and the students when they need to remember what do we do in the halls of mercer how do we act what is our school culture what is our

[00:41:13] school language when we put ourselves out there yeah and it's quite clear what our what our pillars are we actually also have a student edition of our five pillars as well we had created a student equity uh committee this year and um one of the things the students were like oh you know can we actually like massage the language of the pillars and this language that students would better be able to comprehend and we're like um yeah that makes a lot of sense so we have two versions of our uh our equity pillars here which is the same it's the same thing but it's just worded in

[00:41:49] language that is a little more uh child friendly uh so we we broke it down that we um we we do we break uh we broke down the things that we do in equity based on the outputs that we provide for our students, um, daily and weekly. So a few of the things that we do is, uh, for advisory every morning, uh, we put together, uh, lessons. So whether it's a heritage month or whether it's a holiday, uh, we actually do some research. We sit down with students, we sit down with staff, and we put together, if we were to, like, hover on some of these links, you'll see they're all

[00:42:29] linked to, uh, slide decks that we show our students. We want to talk about, really, every day we have off especially some in the recent years we have off for days like we have off for for Eid coming up right well what is that right a lot of our students don't know what that is so really educating our students and our staff as to like what it is that we're celebrating and then a lot of the slides always provide activities

and discussion points for us to go over with them as well and then once we do that one way that we did to engage our staff and to bring them in to get

[00:43:07] them conversating outside of trainings because if you ever noticed your staff at your schools or anything you know trainings can be a little like oh I don't want to do this I don't want to do this so what we do we provided a space for them to pop in an equity cafe in the morning with us coffee and donuts and we have topics that relate to them as the individuals but also them as teachers and leaders in the classroom and how to shape their classroom culture so these are our big ones that um the teachers actually like so we did perspectives just help us and then assumptions and then at the end, we tied both topics into in practice.

[00:43:37] So what does that look like in your classroom? What can you do today? What can you do tomorrow to bring these into your classroom to help kids feel seen, heard, give them more accessibility, and just make a culture where those kids want to actually, like, be the leaders in that classroom?

[00:43:53] So because they took the mic, I'm just going to stand here and talk. You can see, we really get along. The one thing that I do want to say, that our vision for Equity Cafe, really this is a collaborative effort so no school and I'm a loud speaker I was

[00:44:08] cheerleader that was one of the reasons that you know we created the equity cafes in addition to that I will tell you that when we're talking about

[00:44:47] celebrations at school like all three of us meet even other members of the administrative team we have designated meeting times that we meet together and we talk those things through equity cafes everyone on our administrative team goes to that. So we're not going there as to say like we're evaluating equity leads or anything like that. We're going there to participate. We want to be a part of the discussion, but we're also learning together. Like that's the whole premise. So this really, when we're talking about that whole core motto, this was part of the vision for that. It was to make sure that we could lead our teachers in a direction where they felt safe, they felt comfortable, but also that we're growing

[00:45:27] their understanding of what it means to make equity a core focus of what we do okay so we really wanted to break it down oh that's loud it's a loud one we really wanted to uh break it down like how did we get to where we got to we feel very comfortable with our equity initiatives at mercer so we sat down and we wanted to really um kind of explain like like what is our saw what's our formula what's our special sauce if you will so we broke it down in a few different ways so at our foundation we're authentic right so i think the one thing about marcus nikki and i is that

[00:46:03] we're straight shooters everyone in our school knows that our students know it our staff our colleagues know it and i think it's helpful and just the fact that we we are who we are we're willing to talk about all sorts of different things and really say it like it is and so we've built that rapport with uh really really everyone in our school to be able to talk about pertinent issues especially as it relates to equity we learned about our staff and our students and we embrace different perspectives this was not easy y'all like i know we're up here and we're talking about all the amazing things that we do in our schools but like we all know that everyone has

[00:46:38] different perspectives and everybody thinks differently and there's there's sometimes there's pushback on things and we definitely know that and we we have definitely had situations where We've had

to talk to staff, even students about things. But we embrace that because everybody is different and everyone has different perspectives.

[00:46:58] That's important. Like we want to we want to value everybody. So we a lot of that is really like just getting to know people, building relationships, communication. We connected content to personal and professional beliefs and values. So a lot of the things that we do, especially with the staff, the equity cafes, we zoomed out.

[00:47:19] We're like, how can we engage staff in content that is, like, a little bit easier to talk about? Like, instead of, hey, let's talk about race. Like, okay, let's zoom out. Let's talk about assumptions, right? And we would build a lesson talking about assumptions, and we would say, like, we would show different pictures of maybe, like, sports fans.

[00:47:38] Like, what are some assumptions you can make about somebody who's painting their face at a Caps game? clearly they're a big Caps fan, like really kind of going, like talking about fact versus assumptions versus ideas. We do equity cafes on perspectives, really trying to get people to kind of notice their own perspectives, maybe their own biases, their own feelings. And then we relate it to the work that we do. So like the staff really get to see themselves in the work.

[00:48:06] We disrupt the system. We just kind of do what we feel like we need to do. We're not afraid. We're not afraid to go outside the box. We're not afraid to color outside the lines. We do what we feel like we need to do for our community to really grow. And then we also emphasize that this is not an equity thing, right? So the things that we do in school, it's not like, oh, this is an equity thing now. No, it's a Mercer thing. It's a school thing. It's an us thing.

[00:48:36] We're all a part of it. We're not just the equity team. We're all the equity team. Everyone at Mercer is a part of team equity. That's what we also call ourselves, team equity, because it takes all of us, not just one of us or two of us or three of us, it's everybody. So those are some of the things that are out, the foundation, and then, of course, the pillars that we created, we created purposefully to connect with our school community.

[00:49:00] All right. So our support, our main support's right here, Mrs. Dio, and all the other administrators at the building. It is essential. You can't make change within the school without the captain of the ship. Like, she's the final say of everything. And with her support, we're able to change the culture, change mindsets at Mercer because she cosigns with us.

[00:49:23] And she lets it be known to staff like, no, we're going to follow this. We're going to do this together. And that's just the biggest thing. You need admin support to achieve what you want to achieve. We have a strong team of teachers and staff behind us. So over the years, Rich and I have met with teachers individually or as large groups, and we've built support with them.

[00:49:41] We've let them know our true colors, what our true intentions are, and we have trust. And that's the big thing. They trust us. We have open and honest conversations. We always let them know nothing's off the table, and this is a confidential conversation. So true feelings can really help make the change.

[00:49:57] We don't like fluff. We don't like people saying what they think we want to hear. we need to know who you are authentically. And then we believe in follow through and following up. So if we say we're going to do something, or if Mrs. Dale tasks us to do something, someone's going to follow up with us to make sure we follow through. Someone's going to make sure, is the work being done or what is

happening? And then there's constant conversations that help us adjust how we move so that the school can move forward as well. And then data. Data is important.

[00:50:24] We have a very diverse school at Mercer. The data that we collect helps us identify what kids need. the type of kids that we serve because as educators we serve them we don't just teach them we serve them and their needs to meet what they need so any data that comes in regarding kids suspensions absences race ethnicity all that we view it to make sure we're providing services and activities for the teachers and the students so i want to talk about that data piece for a minute because that's really critical so we do look at data strategically to design lessons around that Not only that, it helps us when we're meeting as a team of three to have the pulse of the

[00:51:03] schools so then we know exactly, like Marcus was saying, what our students and our teachers and the community needs. If we weren't looking at data, some of the survey data, or not just that, just even, you know, incidents of racial slurs and hate speech help us to change direction.

[00:51:19] It helps us to really get to the root of, like, what is the issue and how can we address it? How can we denounce it in the right way that's appropriate for our school community? But we want to ensure that, because data doesn't lie, we want to ensure that we're utilizing that to make sure that what we're doing is sound.

[00:51:35] We don't just want to throw things out there at staff and students and community and hope that it sticks. We want to make sure that it is exactly what they need so that we can make change quickly and that it's effective and it's impactful. So that's the big piece behind data being used to make those decisions.

[00:51:57] Okay, so cultural environment, so we've already touched on a lot of this already when we were talking about our cafes and the way that we really built our foundation. But some of the things that we really want to make clear that we do is we're visible. Like Marcus and I are everywhere. Ms. Deal is obviously everywhere. But we make sure that when we are dealing with whether it's racial slurs and hate speech or we're celebrating a holiday or we're doing an advisory lesson and we know that kids are going to have questions, we're visible.

[00:52:25] The students know who we are. The staff know who we are. It's really important that we're there as resources, as neighborhood, as necessary. We visited ITs and CLTs. So, Marks and I actually, we will go and we will actually, like, visit. Like, we'll get subs for the day.

[00:52:42] We'll visit all the CLTs, and we'll all talk about some, like, hot issues that we need to talk about. Again, whether it's about cultural response, cultural responsiveness or racial slurs and hate speech, we'll actually go and talk with them. We collaborate with admin to support equitable concerns across the building.

[00:53:00] We mercerize literally everything. That's a word, by the way, trademark, mercerize. It's literally like everything that we do. We put a mercer stamp on. Even like the colors of our slide deck is blue and yellow because it's important, right?

[00:53:15] Everyone's school is different. So like everyone's needs might vary, but we want to make sure that we're really connecting with our school. So we definitely make everything as mercery as possible. It's a new word, mercery. And we created equity cafes and professional developments that sustain the culture for our staff.

[00:53:36] So let's go back to that for a moment because we know that we're using educational words that might be confusing. So especially at the middle level and the high school level, like all different levels are different. So an IT is an interdisciplinary team. That is a team that's made up of all core content areas.

[00:53:52] So on one team, you have science, math, history, and social studies. And then, so we have those at the middle level, and they meet during their planning blocks. And a CLT is comprised of the same subject. So that's like all English they meet together, all math, and so on.

[00:54:10] And so I do want to give a shout out to them because one of the things that I did strategically this year was I made it so that the two of them had planning at the same exact time. That has been such an amazing thing that we've been able to do. Not only does it allow us to really address concerns that are happening on a daily basis, but it allows them to have the ability to meet with our teachers and have those impactful discussions and change.

[00:54:37] Well, like I said, it's a call to action. We get to go right into action right away so that we can shift the culture, shift what's happening immediately. So I can't say that enough. That is why you know I wanted to make sure that it was a focus of what they do and changing a master schedule to design that around that is critical um so that when principals are looking to figure out like how can we really make the work that equity leads um do impactful that's a way to do that um is to give them time where they're off that they can actually speak with administration but also they give them time off that if there's two of them that they have time to meet and talk together and to give them time where they can actually go into planning meetings with

[00:55:16] teachers and have those discussions. Which I just have to echo is huge because time is everything. Anyone who's been a teacher knows that. So it's been really, really good. All right. So now we'll talk about what we do for the students. So for the kids, we created a student-led equity committee this year. The kids are very helpful with the pillars you saw earlier. They crafted them. They reworded them. Their input is important because they're the man on the ground. They're the soldiers on the ground. They create their own addition of the equity pillars. We've created initiatives to support student culture across Mercer. So Defend the Den, that's an upcoming campaign. We are

[00:55:51] witnessing a rise in hate speech and racial slurs at Mercer. So we're planning a week-long campaign for the morning announcements and advisory to where Rich and I guide the advisory classes through lessons and specific tasking strategies and teach them ways to stand up and defend the den because we're mountain lions to get the wheels turning, to get them, you know, it's a call to action when you're at Mercer. So we have to have everyone doing the work together. Fasting and praying during Ramadan each year we secure rooms we secure coverage for kids to fast and pray it is important to them they will ask if we don't secure it so we have to it's our every year it's annual like

[00:56:27] they know like Mr. Stephenson Mr. Nets got it and the kids appreciate it it's the little things like that they just deeply appreciate it and then this month we're collaborating with the sped department for autism acceptance month and advisory this week they're creating affinity symbols where the kids will talk about autism acceptance and all the details that in collaboration with sped and collaborating across departments for equity concerns is very important because with equity like the sped department's part of equity it's not just race or other things and then lastly yes so we have had strategic alignment over the course of the last three years because as everybody

[00:57:06] knows covid kind of put a stop to a lot of the things that we were doing there's a lot of things you can do in person that you can't do online so when we came back and we developed really revamped all of what we were doing for equity at our school we wanted to ensure that our staff kind of knew what is a support system for equitable practices and so we created kind of like where do you go what do you do if you're in support or need of something that's happening in your classroom immediately ultimately it also showcases like who how this kind of filters, how equity filters through our school, kind of like a baseball diamond, if you will.

[00:57:41] It also shows, like, who is supporting it outside of that diamond and who's on the inside of that diamond. So if you see on the inside of that, the focus are the staff and the students. And we truly believe in that. Like, we can't do this work without them. And so we need them to be the premise of what we do. And so we try to make that our core focus of everything. But then you see we also invite other administrative supports. We have deans that oversee each grade level at the middle level, and so we want them to be heavily involved in supporting equitable practices at our school. And then you can see that myself at the top with all of the other administrators that are

[00:58:21] in the main office, we are connected, interconnected inside of that diamond to the equity leads. And that's because, like I said, without these two wonderful people, the work doesn't power on. it does we need the engine and they're definitely the engine as you could see in this presentation and the enthusiasm and we need the connection also to being in a classroom and understanding students each and every day and what students bring to the table because once you kind of transition into leadership that's something that you know you might not see every single time that you're you know in a different level of leadership and they see that every single day so we need that

[00:58:58] connection and anything that you guys want to add to that I mean I hopefully you could tell how much we very much value equity we love we love the work that we do uh and really we're really grateful to have a principal in this deal who very much you know allows us to uh use our brains and and do all the things and and have a really good time making our school culture what it is which is awesome the big takeaway is just everything's for the kids nothing's to change opinions nothing should be like change minds or what you believe like the kids have to be the focus we didn't get into education for the pay or whatever.

[00:59:37] We got into it for kids to teach them things. - So we just wanna thank you so much for giving us this opportunity. We could talk about this all night, but we know that there's other people that want to speak. And I just wanna give a shout out because Goshen and our school was actually in the same cluster.

[00:59:54] And that's another benefit that when you have two schools or even more, because I would say our whole entire cluster, and Brian can attest to this, has a core focus on equity. And so we are grateful to have elementary schools that feed into our middle school that are doing this work, but not only that, everyone that's in our elementary schools comes to us, and then we're able to pass that on to John Champ that does amazing things as well.

[01:00:21] So I do have to give a shout out to the John Champ high school cluster, because without even the colleagues that I have, this work doesn't get done as well. So thank you so much again, and we appreciate it.

[01:00:58] Good evening. My name is Brian Klippel and I am the proud principal at Goshen Post Elementary School and I'm joined with our fantastic equity lead, Ms. Krishana Goins, and I appreciate

going right after Mercer because you will see a through line of our equity work starting at the elementary level setting a strong foundation and making sure that we are not shying away from the conversation and we are embedding the work in everything that we do every single day. Goshen Post opened six years ago with a focus on authentic learning for every child every day and though we use project

[01:01:35] based learning as that vehicle equity is at the center and equity work is collaborative work and so we need to make sure that everyone is at the table with a wide variety of voices and perspectives to make sure that we are capturing every single person in our school community and making sure that our students not only learn the content in the building but are able to apply it outside of the building we always make sure that we say that the answer is in the room and we just need to make sure everyone's in there to be able to find it and so our work has started roughly five years ago

[01:02:11] shortly after we opened and making sure that we were very strategic with the work setting the foundation through our morning meetings and expanding those opportunities looking at different celebrations. And we wanted to make sure that we didn't just focus on celebrations, but family gatherings, especially during winter months. Some of our families aren't celebrating, but they're gathering. And that's a common through line that every person has. And we want to make sure we focused in on that to really ground ourselves in that authenticity. Our work started with making

[01:02:48] sure that we were building the capacity of our staff and making sure that we were ensuring that our community knew that we valued this work and that it wasn't an initiative, it was a commitment. And so we advertised that continuously and making sure that it was visible.

[01:03:08] We didn't want to shy away from the work. We didn't want to hide the work. We wanted to be as transparent as possible to make sure that the community knew what students were talking about, what staff was talking about every single day in the building. I can continue on, but I do want to raise Ms. Gowen's voice into the room because she has spearhead much of the work that we've done at Goshen Post and it is my responsibility as the principal to ensure that her voice is heard and that the work is completed and

[01:03:42] the work is successfully done in every single classroom every single day because every child deserves a high quality education and it's my responsibility as well as our staff's responsibility to ensure that happens. So I have the most joyful job in the world because I get to teach first grade but I get to also be the equity lead at Goshen Post and for me for those in the room who know me. I'm a pretty non-negotiable street shooter. The work is happening. You don't get to decide where you get on and off. It's happening. So something that was really important to us was

[01:04:21] that at the same time we were building staff capacity, we were bringing things directly to students because it's really a matter of we only get one chance, right, with our students. They're only in first grade once. They're only in second grade once. And we have to make sure that all of those environments are spaces where students feel capable, feel confident in who they are and feel like they belong at Goshen Post.

[01:04:42] Equity is a very active word at Goshen Post. It's really a verb, and we talk all the time about how we don't do equity work, we do every child, every day work. And what we mean by that is that it is proactive, it's intentional, it's comprehensive, and it's embedded.

[01:04:58] So it's not that they're only hearing about equity at the beginning of the day, and then we send them off, right, to be people. It's that it's embedded into the content that they're learning. It's embedded into every experience, And it's embedded into how students learn, not just what they're learning, but actually the process of their learning.

[01:05:16] Something that I think is really special and unique about working at Goshen Post is we really reject those quick fixes. So when there's oftentimes that we're met with challenges that we see as opportunities, we're going to go deep. And we're going to go deep, but we're going to do that pretty fast.

[01:05:31] So we're pretty notorious for turning something in a really short period of time, but something that's actually sustainable. meaning that it's something that can be grown. It's something that every educator in the building is capable of doing and doing well. And it's something that is going to have a lasting impact for our students.

[01:05:48] Something else that's really unique is that we see MTSS as being foundational to creating an equitable environment. So when we're talking about doing equity work at Goshen Post, it's talking about working with our principal, with our assistant principal, with our deans, but it's also thinking about like how do I fit into the equation as the equity lead how do our counselors fit into that equation how do our social how does our social worker fit into that equation but also our MSAC our LEAF and our SEAC reps are part of that equation as well and then our staff as a whole I could talk

[01:06:24] forever about all the things we have going on at Goshen Post because it really started five years ago and I always say that we were doing the work at Goshen before it was in vogue so we talk about how like a lot of our work has been really sustainable because it wasn't that we tried to hit everything at once. It was that we really spent five years really strategically meeting teachers where they were and moving them. So I think that something really important in equity work is that it's not necessarily about always meeting you where you are. It's I met you where you were and now you have to move because we're not going to have the same conversation over and over and over again and not see any movement, right? It is time and you are capable of moving

[01:07:03] along just like our students, right, are capable of growing. So a lot of what we do at Goshen is we connect our content to the world beyond morning meeting. So when we're thinking about authentic learning experiences that are happening in our classroom, it's really about helping students see themselves as the vehicles to creating change in one way or another. That might look like looking deeper into the five C's. It looks like student-centered learning experiences, but it really looks like an emphasis on the why are we learning this and how are we going to use this long term.

[01:07:36] I always say that I see my first graders as 6- and 7-year-olds, but one day they're going to be 16, one day they're going to be 26, one day they're going to be 36, and the work that I do every day in my classroom and the work that our teachers do every day lays the foundation for them to become whole, connected, and engaged people in the world.

[01:07:53] So it really does matter that every minute we have with them, We're really reinforcing their ability to move from being learners to being leaders within their community. It also looks like elevating our SEL resources to really contextualize inter and interpersonal skills.

[01:08:10] So we do a lot of transformative SEL at Goshen Post. And what that means is that when students are engaged in conversations as it relates to Heritage Month, it's not related to just broad stories,

right? It's really related to stories of joy and justice, and there's depth and meaning in those resources.

[01:08:26] And I think what's really powerful in that is that students and staff are often learning together, right? And they're combating those single stories that they have in their brain about certain groups of people by saying, wow, I never knew about this. And I think something that's really, really powerful that we do with kids is it's a focus on youth, right?

[01:08:45] So if we're talking about black history, we're talking about black children in the now, right, who are creating change and people who they can connect to. so it's not just a focus on the history of different groups of people it's a focus on the future that students will create and it's not just we're learning about black history for the black students in our building we're learning about it for every child because every child is a part of that story and what that history will look like in the future another thing that we have at Goshen Post that I think we are incredibly proud of is we have a commitment called OneGP and what that

[01:09:20] really means to us is that it's a proactive opportunity for us to build the capacity of educators, students, and families to become culturally competent and aware. It is proactively creating a sustainable solution to sustain a positive, welcoming, and affirming safe school for every child. And it's really about empowering students through deeper learning. So how this came about was that we were given the opportunity to think about how we could do things differently in our building to enhance students' sense of belonging. And especially to think about how are

[01:09:54] we going to reduce and eventually eradicate hate speech in our building. And I think a lot of people were like, you can turn something tonight, right? And you can do a lesson tomorrow, and it's going to be great, and the kids will never do it again, right? And we said, that is not it. That's not what we're going to do. So we ended up rolling out a 15-week program that centered around themes of identity, diversity, justice, and action. And it was really strategic how we talked to kids about it, about you have to first feel good about yourself, right?

[01:10:21] Before you can feel good about others, right? And that's when we moved from that identity to diversity. And then from there, we started talking about justice of you have to understand how you navigate the world and how other people do that too. And how you have a voice and what to do with it, which led us into action where students really learned, how do I be an upstander and what does that look like?

[01:10:42] For the action component of this program, we have a program called Gator to Gator. And what happens is our older gators are paired with our little gators, and they come to see each other for morning meetings on every Monday, and they talk through different themes of action together.

[01:11:00] What's really powerful about that is for our little ones, they've only been on the earth for a really short period of time. And the world is really big, and the world is often really scary. But for our older kids, they're a little bit older and wiser, right? They've been through some things. They've had some experiences. So it gives the opportunity for our littles to have those conversations with a trusted peer, right, in the presence of trusted adults.

[01:11:23] And those conversations are really strategic where students are not just talking about what they're going to do as upstanders. They're actually working through it together and practicing those skills. Another thing that we have done at Goshen to really make this work go deep is that we reworked what we call our MTSS calendar to really make sure that morning meeting was responsive to what students needed.

[01:11:46] So for example, on Mondays, we do our kind of one GPE lesson and our gator-to-gator lessons. On Tuesdays, we focus in on that second step lesson. For the week on Wednesdays, we look at the Heritage Month for whatever that month is. But then Thursdays, we call them Thoughtful Thursdays, and they're really problem-solving.

[01:12:02] So it's talking to the kids about what is going on in their world, right, and what can we do about it? How can we continue to, you know, be leaders and actually do the things that we're talking about? And then Fridays are the application days. So to say, okay, we've been talking about this skill all week, now let's practice, now let's do it.

[01:12:17] And it gives us an opportunity as teachers to step in as coaches for the kids and say, like, wow, I really like how so-and-so is doing this. Can I add on to this? Or saying, like, whoa, you are confronted with a really big situation. Let's talk about how we might handle some of those things. I think what has made the work really successful at Goshen is that we do joyful work.

[01:12:38] So I think that we don't walk in the room, we're like, hey, we're going to have a really hard conversation with all of you, right? It's we come in and we're like, we're going to have a really awesome conversation about how we are going to build our capacity to reach every child every day. And I think that people know that, you know, I tend to be kind of all over the place in terms of like, I'm all around the building, popping around, and I'm a four foot eight black woman, so I'm hard to miss.

[01:13:02] But I think that people know that, like, when, you know, we step up there to deliver professional learning or whatever it is, that this is going to be a really deep conversation, but it's going to be a really rewarding conversation. And they're going to leave not just a better teacher for it, but a better person on the other side of it.

[01:13:19] I don't know. I'm trying to think of all the other things. I think that it's just been a really impactful journey. And I would encourage every school to go on their own journey because I think it's really powerful when the work comes from inside your building and what it is that your teachers need.

[01:13:36] And I think that staff trust us because it's coming from us. It's not coming from, like, the ethos, right? It's coming from our building. They know that it's made with each of them in mind. And they know that we know that they will be successful in doing it or delivering it or whatever it is because that is the expectation, right?

[01:13:53] Failure is not an option. Copping out is not an option. right so like you are going to do and you're going to do it well and I can't wait to hear about how great it went um in your classroom but I think the last thing I'll say is that having admin who are supportive and not just supportive but committed as I think Mercer articulated perfectly you it's essential um I I could not move anything forward if I didn't work for arguably the best principal right but if I didn't work um at a school that really deeply values this and I

[01:14:26] I really appreciate being an equity lead at Goshen Post because I know that I can swing around the corner at any time of day, right, to Brian and say, hey, this is what's going on in the school. And he's like, great, let's dig in, let's do it. And I think that that is really empowering for staff to have those opportunities to say, this is what I'm hearing from kids.

[01:14:45] This is what I'm hearing from families and to be able to go to their leader and their leader say, yeah, let's do it. So thank you so much for the opportunity for us to share about equity work at Goshen Post. It's really such a joy to be able to bring the work outside of the four walls of our buildings.

[01:15:18] This thing on? Okay, it is. Well, hello, I'm Caitlin Couch, and I am Equity Lead and EL teacher at Potomac Elementary, and I'm also an idea stealer from everything shared tonight. Thank you.

[01:15:38] I'm Mark Haidt. I'm not as funny as she is, but I'm the principal of Potomac Elementary School and her partner. We have two things we want to talk to you about. We timed ourselves, so we don't want to take too much of your time, but equity is the heart of everything that we do. We are a Title I school, 56% of our students are economically disadvantaged, 43% of our students are English learners, and one common theme you're gonna hear in the two examples we share with you tonight is voice.

[01:16:01] Making sure that all of our students have a voice, and making sure that our parents have a voice too, regardless of what language they speak. - Did it work or not? Great, great. The first piece that we would like to focus on is from the LCPS strategic plan, goal one, which is empowered students, and tonight you'll specifically hear about how we're helping students prepare to be better communicators and collaborators.

[01:16:30] For the last three years as Equity Lead, I have been co-facilitating book studies, and I've been doing this with Mr. Hayden, and we've been doing this as an entire school faculty during our monthly meetings. Year one, we studied culturally responsive teaching and the brain, and we really just focused on one chapter per month, and the primary focus that year was just on learning the philosophy of culturally responsive teaching and introducing the heart work to our staff, and that gave us a foundation to build on over the next few years.

[01:17:01] Last year, which was our year two, we continued the implementation of culturally responsive teaching and that philosophy for the first few months of the school year using the book Culturally Responsive Teaching for Multilingual Learners, as 43% of our school population is EL. And then for the second half of the school year, we ended up taking theory and putting it into practice with integrating concrete strategies for teachers to roll out in classrooms, and then each month teachers reported back at our staff meetings.

[01:17:32] So for example, for one month, we talked about the importance of using sentence stems, and that helps students give them opportunities to practice using academic language and key vocabulary to help explain their thoughts and ideas across multiple subject areas.

[01:17:48] And then the following month, we had the teachers come back work in collaborative teams to share how that rollout went of the sentence stems. And then they could, you know, share the success, but then also seek advice from colleagues for how to improve. And during this share, we also utilized cooperative learning strategies, which Mark will discuss in a little bit.

[01:18:09] But these strategies can also be applied in classrooms with teachers. I'm sorry, with students. And then year three, which is this year, we have continued this work using the book Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning. So building off the work that we did last year, we now have every grade and every teacher implementing culturally responsive strategies to change the academic instruction for our students.

[01:18:34] And we've standardized this school-wide by implementing these components in our lesson plan templates. So for example, this year, one of the chapters that we read really focused on culturally responsive vocabulary instruction and so what we did was we collaborated with our reading specialists who have been through the letters training and they helped to co-facilitate this PD with us and now that

we've done that and taught it to our entire staff we actually implement the letters vocabulary instructional routine school-wide and we've also integrated this into our lesson plan templates so that everyone is held accountable for that so students are

[01:19:12] seeing it across multiple grade levels across multiple subject areas and we've even incorporated that into our science plans and what's really neat is that each week mark speaking of lesson plan templates reviews every science team every science lesson plan for each team and we have actually aligned our walk through forms to correlate with some of these culturally responsive strategies so we have what our look fors and things like that and this has all come from our professional development and the reading that we've done in the chapters and to go off the theme as everyone has been saying you know all of this is a big thanks to the administrative support that I have at our school and specifically

[01:19:49] from Mark to ensure that instructional changes are happening for our students and across our entire school so that each and every student can be successful. But now I'm going to turn it over to Mark to discuss Kagan cooperative learning strategies that we also implement school-wide. Thank you Caitlin she's also my tech person she showed me how to use the clicker. I really appreciate that.

[01:20:16] So our umbrella for everything we do at Potomac Elementary School is culturally responsive teaching. And within the framework of culturally responsive teaching, a key component is student-centered learning. Well, one type of student-centered learning is cooperative learning.

[01:20:32] So cooperative learning is a huge instructional foundation at our school. And essentially what cooperative learning does is it takes something that could be with good intention, such as group work, having kids work together in a group, or giving kids opportunities to even, like, turn and talk to each other.

[01:20:49] But when you do things like that, if you don't have a structure in place for how kids are supposed to work with one another, how they're supposed to engage in conversation with one another, how they're supposed to take turns talking with one another, how they're supposed to contribute with one another, you don't really know what's happening. You could have a dominant speaker.

[01:21:05] It could be because they're proficient in English and maybe a classmate is not, or a person is more confident in themselves. They could just take over the whole conversation. They could do all of the talking. They could start doing all of the work. Another person who may feel like they don't have a voice could be used to not being permitted to talk.

[01:21:20] So just sit there quietly and not speak because they feel like their voice isn't valued. There could be a whole number of reasons why academic discourse is not happening from kids when you don't give appropriate structures to ensure that it does. So we address this through the lens of culturally responsive teaching by having cooperative learning structures built into every single lesson plan for every single subject, every single day.

[01:21:42] So one thing that you'll notice when what Caitlin was saying was with Culturally Responsive Teaching in the Brain by Zaretta Hammond, we really learned the brain science behind Culturally Responsive Teaching. We really learned the philosophy behind Culturally Responsive Teaching. But after a year and a half of that, the reality is you can teach people the philosophy.

[01:22:01] You can teach people the best practice. You can teach people the need for Culturally Responsive Teaching, but you can't force the mindset to change. What you can do is you can force

instructional practices to change. So in our school, like, we're constantly working on the mindset. We're constantly working on the philosophy.

[01:22:17] We're constantly working on the belief system. But we're also making sure that concrete changes happen in the classroom every single day. And that's what she meant when she was saying that we take strategies we're learning in our book and we're putting them into practice and they require components of our instructional day. Being that 43% of our kids are English learners, most research, the most recent research that even the EL department had given us was that approximately 2% of the day, English learners are talking. So 98% of an instructional day, most English learners are not saying anything, at least not in the academic sense. Maybe when they're at lunch or they're out at recess and they're able to socialize with their friends,

[01:22:56] they might be talking more. But in the actual day, they're given approximately 2% of the day to talk. So in our school, again, we want to give our children a voice. They're constantly engaging in academic discourse with cooperative learning structures. They have the equal participation. They have the individual accountability for knowing what they have to say and when. Some people would make the argument, well, when you have English learners and you ask them to talk with other kids in the group, maybe they don't feel comfortable talking. So how could you expect them to have these equal conversations? Well, we give sentence stems, right? We provide sentence stems for all of our students, and we don't put our students or English learners in a

[01:23:35] position where they stand out because they're the only ones using sentence stems. Every child in our school uses sentence stems every day because it's part of our slide decks. It's part of our instructional framework. So that's what I have to say about cooperative learning. I'm not going to get ahead of myself because I said I'd talk about two things. I already forgot the lesson Caitlin gave me. Next slide is mine too, though, so I'm going to go on. Okay, so in addition to making sure that our children have a voice. They know that they're valued. They're talking every single day. Their voice is heard. And you should come see the great work that Caitlin does in her class.

[01:24:10] She's an English and EL teacher in fifth grade. She has awesome discourse with her kids. She works great with her co-teacher. We really have awesome things happening. It's also important for us to engage our community. So when you think about goal number four, engaged community, our job is to enhance educational excellence through building meaningful relationships with families. In particular when you look at 4.1 our job is also to deepen family engagement by offering inclusive opportunities for conversation but what do you do how do you have inclusive conversations or meaningful or building for relationships with someone who does not speak your language in particular if they don't speak the english language at all how do you facilitate those

[01:24:49] facilitate those conversations how do you build that community and one of the things that we've done at potomac is over the past few years we have built language-based family and community engagement teams. And I'm going to let Caitlin talk about one of our family and community engagement teams before I give a whole overview about the program. So I am a part of our Cafe Compadres team, which is our Spanish-speaking language community. It's made up of classroom teachers, EL teachers, me, and our parent liaison. So I don't look like I would speak Spanish,

[01:25:26] but I grew up in Texas, and so I was around a lot of Spanish. And as I grew up, I developed my spanish abilities and i'm able to communicate with families i wouldn't say it's perfect but it's pretty pretty

good spanish um so we do meet quarterly with our cafe compadres families and these events are held totally in spanish the topics that we use in these events heavily depend on parent feedback that we use through surveys to really get a pulse on what do the parents need what does the community need it also builds trust with our parents and so some of the topics that we have discussed in the last three years have been parent view, student

[01:26:05] assessments throughout the year, like what do they mean, and how can we interpret those scores, and then also strategies to improve literacy at home. In addition to our Cafe Compadres events, an integral part of our program is our Padres Delegados group, or our parent delegates, and that's a group of parent representatives for each grade level that speak both English and Spanish, and they help bridge home life with school life for our Spanish-speaking community. So we meet monthly with our Padres Delegados group and their role is to act as our community representatives so together we brainstorm ways to increase parental involvement, ways to grow our community

[01:26:42] at our school events, and ways to support the new families to our schools. And furthermore our Padres Delegados have created Spanish parent group chats in WhatsApp and so that keeps other parents informed about grade level events, but also school events and community events. And as a result of our Café Compadres program, we have seen improved parent involvement in our other school events, such as multicultural night, our monthly parent cafes with the principal, PTA events, math night, science night, go on.

[01:27:12] Because when they're in those WhatsApp groups and they're saying like, hey, are you going to like multicultural night? And you know, like you're going to go if your friend goes. So it's a nice way to get them to come together. And so we have had big turnouts from that. Some of the other successes that we've had, we've had cross-cultural participation. So in May of last year at our Café Compadres event, we had two first grade classes and a second grade class sing a song to increase parent turnout. But in addition to that, a lot of our English-speaking families came and learned more about our Café Compadres event and our team. This past September 15th to October

[01:27:49] 15th, we celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month, and our Spanish-speaking families came in. They provided food for our staff, and they decorated our school to celebrate, and the parents were so excited to come in and share their food with us. We had so many great pupusas, but we also were able to build relationships with families that, you know, they might not see some of these teachers a lot of the time, and so they were in the staff lounge that day, you know, sharing with us and getting to know everyone, but in addition to all of those things we also incorporate some of the Kagan

[01:28:23] cooperative learning strategies in our parent cafe groups and so our events and things so that you know we explain that hey these are the strategies that we're using with our students and this is how they're developing their language and their social skills and so now you get to learn how your child is learning through experiencing these strategies yourself but I could again go on about our cafe compadres team but I want to turn it back over to mark who will share about our Farsi speaking language group, and they were actually the ones that started it all.

[01:28:55] Thank you, Caitlin. So, basically, like Caitlin said, these groups are so powerful because, number one, they're led by staff members who speak the language of the community, who come from the same countries that our families within these communities come from, who share cultural values and cultural norms with these families, and I have a, I love my community. I feel like I have a good

relationship with my community. I love my families, my parents, my students, my teachers. And my parents love me, I think. I think they're respectful to me. They're kind to me. But the reality is, if a parent speaks Farsi, and I speak English, and a parent has something they really want to talk about that's

[01:29:32] serious with their kid, and there's a teacher next to me who speaks Farsi, that parent is going to go past me and talk to that teacher who speaks Farsi. Because they realize, this teacher can understand me. This teacher can identify with some of the things I want to talk about. And from my perspective, It just makes it so much more important for hiring managers and schools and principals and assistant principals to really focus on trying to have a diverse staff that looks like the community.

[01:29:55] You need to have a staff that speaks the language of the community, who can identify with the community. And that's the beauty of the Parent Chai. That's the beauty of the Finjan Kahawa, which is an Arabic language parent and community engagement team that we'll talk about next, and the beauty of the Café Compadres. We have the staff, and we have these families who have made this strong partnership and come together.

[01:30:16] And like Ms. Couch had said, we have a parent delegate team on every single one of those groups. And the parent delegates, they meet with our staff, who are the leaders of these groups, every single month. And they plan out a quarterly event. So every quarter, we have these special language presentations for our families.

[01:30:34] When we have our parent cafe, every month we have a parent cafe meeting, which is just in English. And it's about topics that are happening within the school. Also, we've noticed that since we've done this, we've had a huge turnout of our non-English-speaking families start to come to our parent cafes, more non-English-speaking families than English-speaking families.

[01:30:52] We have a special translator headset system that we use where we always have Farsi, Arabic, and Spanish are the three largest languages outside of English. It makes up like 98% of our language groups in our community. We always have interpreters for Spanish, Farsi, and Arabic at the parent cafe.

[01:31:08] They speak in real time, so they're always interpreting. If you're there, you're listening, you're hearing kind of like a background conversation happening because this conversation is happening in four different languages. And what that allows is you can have an English-speaking parent, a Farsi language parent, an Arabic language parent, and a Spanish language parent sitting side by side, and they're all listening to a presentation in their own language simultaneously without stopping and passing a microphone and having a delayed clap. Because, like, you make a joke in English, the English people laugh, and then, like, you translate in Spanish, and then the Spanish families laugh.

[01:31:42] Like, everyone claps together because they're all in it together. We are one community, one LCPS, one Mercer, one Potomac. So just, I know we don't have a lot of time, and I don't want to continue talking about all this because, like, everyone else has said, I could talk forever about this. This is our passion at Potomac.

[01:31:58] But one story from Parent Shy. We had a parent who moved here with her husband from Iran a few years ago. and she had a kindergarten child at the time the husband he was working a lot he was traveling a lot the mother did not speak english she she was scared in the community she doesn't like to even go out and and like shop when when it's daytime because she doesn't know people and she doesn't want people to ask her questions and things like that she hated it here she wanted to go home so badly she

felt isolated she felt she knew no one in her neighborhood her son was starting to give her behavioral problems she couldn't communicate with the teacher she didn't know what to do she

[01:32:33] felt 100% isolated and she wanted to leave. As soon as we created our Parent Chai, we brought her into our Parent Chai team because Farsi is her native language. She met a teacher who's from Iran who speaks Farsi. She met other families within our community who speak Farsi who are from the country where she was from. And she was able to network and make relationships with the community. She started volunteering in our school every single day because she loved our school so much. We actually got her a job as a substitute, and then we got her a job as a site-based substitute, so she's literally getting paid to be there every single day, but she's happy now, and she loves what she does, and her son is so proud because he sees his mom as

[01:33:12] a teacher in this school, and her husband recently told her, he's like, well, I want to go back to Iran now, and she said, no, absolutely not. I'm not leaving America. She's like, I love it here. This is my new community, and that's kind of the power of the work that we do um with with our i'll go to my next slide actually i'm gonna go a few slides ahead because i talked way too much there um our arabic language team is our finjan kahawa and it just means a cup of a cup of tea a cup of coffee and um a powerful a powerful uh experience from the finjan kahawa team we had a family who moved here from sudan over the summer at the very end of the

[01:33:50] summer and the father had been here for a while he was already kind of established in america but the wife and the two sons were brand new and they moved here because they were fleeing the war or they were fleeing the violence that was happening in sudan at the time they were refugees and they left everything and came here in complete isolation i remember just sitting there you know giving the kids a high five and a fist bump in the main office this was before this just before a couple of days before the school year started and just saying hi to the mom and you know they recognized a smile and a wave but i she doesn't but she didn't know the language so i was able to contact one of the leaders of the finjan kahawa team and i'm like look we got this new family they only speak arabic them for from sudan would you please take her number and her information

[01:34:29] introduce her to the parent delegates for the finjan kahawa team get her on that whatsapp and just start communicating with our network working with her now and she's like absolutely and we did it immediately so so again like this is the power um we believe in building community you know when you have a school community the geography around your school that your boundaries where kids live within that boundary and they come to your school as a result that doesn't mean you necessarily have a school community right you have to build community because a lot of the times the families who are speaking different languages they're isolating themselves within different pockets within that geography they're staying with other families that speak their language they're staying

[01:35:05] with other families that share those cultural norms and values and that same type of isolation could happen in a school system too you know and if our parents don't feel like you've created opportunities for them to come in and to have a voice and you're creating the opportunities for to be there because you want them there, my perspective is you have to put effort into building that community, and that's what we do. So I value her partnership. Caitlin is a fantastic equity lead. I also value the equity department and the school board. Dr. Deans and Mrs. Chandler, they've come out and visited my school before. They've both seen the dual language immersion programs and seen our kindergartners in our Spanish kindergarten class. Mrs. Chandler,

[01:35:45] she came out and she saw our No Roos events. It's the celebration of the Persian New Year, And because of our Parent Chai, we now celebrate Persian Year every year. Mr. Mohamed and Mrs. Frosina, they've come out multiple times. Mr. Mohamed, he was there for our Parent Chai last year. It might have been this year. I can't remember.

[01:36:01] It was this year. Yeah, early in the year. Michelle, she's been to our school. She's been to our dual language immersion class too, I believe, with Dr. Dean. So thank you for bringing Dr. Deans with you. They've been to our science classes. They see the interaction happening with kids and the inclusive practices that we have. So we really appreciate the school division's support and leadership and guidance.

[01:36:20] I couldn't do all this without her. She is a huge staple in our school. She's very respected for what she does, and it is a true partnership. But we appreciate you guys giving us the opportunity to be here and supporting the work that we do. A round of applause for all of our equity-oriented change agents.

[01:36:46] I did not get ahead of myself when I said equity-oriented change agents because as you heard, there are so many unique perspectives, And the golden thread woven throughout all of the presentations this evening is student-centered first work, ensuring the fidelity of what needs to happen at each and every school that collectively makes up this amazing tapestry of students and families that we call LCPS.

[01:37:16] So, again, I thank you so much for coming out to share. And as we continue to work, I'm going to be soliciting your expertise to continue to bolster this work so that we can create a fidelity amongst all 97 of our schools here in LCPS because this is the gold standard.

[01:37:32] You've heard from them. And a couple of folks were invited that couldn't make it because of conflicts of schedule, so I include them in those thoughts as well. So I thank you for what you brought to us tonight. You have amplified and illuminated the amazing work that you are doing in our division, and we want to make sure and ensure that this work continues to grow and infect the entire division because it's everyone's responsibility to do this work.

[01:37:57] Thank you. Dr. Deans? They need a standing ovation.

[01:38:24] So, equity committee, what do you think the next step is? we call you to action. In every minute experience that you have in Loudoun County Public Schools, you've heard it. It can happen. So you can't say, oh, it's not happening at my school.

[01:38:45] You can make it happen at your school. And so it is that I give you that challenge this evening. With that being said, I want to stop and pause and ask you to complete those yellow sheets that I gave you at the beginning. You thought I was going to forget, didn't you, Robin?

[01:39:09] Thank you, Robin. I'd like for each person to complete the yellow forms so that we can bring every school building in this system to the same level that these people are here on our podium tonight. I just get excited. Don't I get excited in the classroom? I jump in and start doing science equipment working with science equipment it is so exciting to know that all of the effort put forth

[01:39:44] is now or has now come to fruition and for that I am grateful I am grateful I am grateful okay we don't have um to to worry about the formalities what we want to do is give you a few announcements Come on, Dr. Ellis Williams, and tell us about the tea on April 27th.

[01:40:17] April 27th at the Historic Douglas School, the Equity Committee will be holding the third annual Equity Tea beginning at 1 o'clock.

[01:40:34] And it is open to the community. We want to make sure to reach out to Ms. Erin Conkle, our MSAC chair, to check to make sure that I know that a lot of people are planning to go. And I don't think we have unlimited seating, but reach out to her to let her know that you will be coming. there will be a cadre of awards being distributed to both senior leadership, building principals, educators, equity leads, and student equity ambassadors.

[01:40:57] I'm excited because this year we know that we have so many awards named after our first male trailblazer as a board member, and we have other awards that will be renamed at that event as well. So I'm really excited that we'll all be able to come out and support this third annual equity.

[01:41:16] Again, 1 o'clock at the Historic Douglas School, so we're very excited about that. But while I'm up here, there's also a cadre of events which we will share with you through our email hub. We have tons of events through Loudon Pride as well as various initiatives that are happening at schools.

[01:41:34] We have a dance coming up at Freedom, which is called the Hope Dance, which is focused on bringing together our students under the Auspice of Student Services with the diverse backgrounds as well as neurodiverse engagement in that space. So there are a cadre of different events that are coming up here in LCPS, so we will get those out to you all.

[01:41:55] Thank you. Yeah, and I assure you, if you go to their events, you'll have a good time. They had me rocking at 8 o'clock in the morning. And the other announcement is I'd like for you to consider this, that we would ask you at some point in the near future to vote that this committee can stay together for two years.

[01:42:21] I said that in the beginning. I'm saying it again. In the bylaws of the equity committee, the committee runs from January to December of each calendar year. But I'm the school board member who is the chair of this committee.

[01:42:37] I will be here for two years, and then I'm going to run and be here for FOMO. So we want some continuity in the work of the equity committee. And so be thinking of that because when we have all the school board members here, we're going to ask you to vote so I can tell Dr. Spence, everybody say yeah.

[01:43:01] And we have to take it to the full school board. So the next equity committee meeting is May 2nd, right here in this same place. Will you please come and encourage others to come as well? I am so happy to have had this experience with this panel today.

[01:43:20] and I've been to some schools but I'm going to some more I've already sent jury a text schedule me at that school get them before they leave so I just want you to know that we appreciate your support your participation your energy related to the equity committee here in Loudoun County Public Schools thank you and good night



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