

The School Committees Report: Update on Cultural Competency and Anti-Racism Work in Curriculum Development

Concord Public Schools and the Concord Carlisle Regional School District have a strategic planning objective to create a collaborative and inclusive culture in the schools and community that values diversity and recognizes the contributions and uniqueness of each learner. The work to achieve this is underway and is being approached with five strategic initiatives that include:

- Developing a shared community understanding of what diversity means in Concord and Concord-Carlisle Public Schools and creating district procedures for applying this understanding to work being conducting in the schools,
- Implementing and expanding ongoing professional development for all staff with a focus on cultural proficiency and inclusive practices to meet the individual learning needs of each student,
- Increasing culturally responsive curriculum and students' knowledge and understanding of a wide variety of perspectives and learning styles,
- Continuing to actively recruit and maintain a diverse staff in the district; and,
- Partnering with students and families from Boston to increase opportunities for them, as members of the community, to participate in the schools and Concord and Carlisle communities.

The School Committees received an update on one element of the strategic initiative at their meeting held on December 1. Committee members were joined by 22 of the 30 educators who serve on the Districts' Cultural Competency Committee (CCC). The CCC, which includes educators from PreK through Grade 12, was founded in 2017 and continues to meet on a regular basis to continually work on curriculum, professional development, institutional practices and hiring for both Districts.

In addition to the CCC work and other efforts, the Districts have engaged a professional cultural competency consultant, Dr. Paula Martin, to help advise educators, teachers and administrators. Dr. Martin also participated at the School Committee meeting. Dr. Martin praised the on-going work citing the commitment, conversation and action as well as the willingness to make a difference that she experiences working with CPS and CCHS.

The presentation outlined the efforts from pre-K through grade 12 for School Committee members as well as members of the public. These efforts are designed to embed cultural competency and anti-racism elements into the curriculum as opposed to being a stand-alone topic. Each presenter offered an outline of some of the efforts which were not meant to reflect the entirety of work but rather examples of the comprehensive approach to cultural competency and anti-racism. These examples included:

- **Colleen Desmond** who outlined efforts at the Kindergarten level to carefully and intentionally choose appropriate children's literature and picture books,
- **Bob Fardy** discussed grade 2 social studies that looks at African American and abolitionists who lived in Concord,
- **Amelia Burns, Nancy Dillon, Julie Turner and Beth Kalikstein** gave an overview of how they work to integrate diverse and inclusive books into the 4th grade curriculum,
- **Sharon Hehn** highlighted efforts to find diverse and inclusive books that cross curriculums of reading, writing, and the sciences for the read aloud for the 4th and 5th grade remote academy,
- **Anna Anderson** documented the music department's grade 4-8 focus on contributions of African American to music history, introducing prominent black and Asian composers and string players as well as featuring videos of diverse performers,
- **Karin Baker, Catherine Curran, Deb Jemison, and Joe Meyer** talked about their work as the leaders of the Concord Middle School METCO Achievement Strategies Program and their focus

to provide students with a safe place for dialogue, self-advocacy skills, and social-emotional learning supports,

- **Sarah Oelkers Bullwinkel** outlined the on-going literature review to identify under-represented, non-dominant culture groups in books with a goal of adding at least one new core text reading for each level in 6-8th grade,
- For 8th grade social studies, **Seeta Durvasula** pointed to the elements of the curriculum that challenges students to examine how society influences an individual's identity as well as how labels and assumptions that others make about us influence individual identity and why humans divide people into we and they; while also looking at slavery and abolitionist movements in Concord,
- **Sharon Staggers Moss** discussed the 8th grade science and science club's use of famous quotes and the study of biographies of women and people of color,
- **Kate Fleming**, Chair of the CCHS English Department, and Shel Hull outlined how they are working to weave diverse writers and poets into the curriculum as well as utilizing both window and mirror themed literature in each grade level at the high school,
- **Samantha Fox-Morrow** summarized the approach being taken in CCHS social studies courses of World Cultures and Civilizations as well as U.S. History to examine the experiences of women, immigrants, minorities, civil rights, discrimination, and resistance,
- **Tracie Dunn** charted the student-centered and culturally responsive art education at the high school which features an examination of legacy; and,
- **Jamie Andrade** from Rivers and Revolution at CCHS featured their work with students to examine relationships and institutions in a community as well as literature that features a windows and mirror element.

Committee members encourage interested community to watch the presentations from the educators by viewing the December, 1st School Committee meeting which is available at Minuteman Media Network on the Town of Concord's website, www.concordma.gov; the update on these curriculum efforts begin approximately 24 minutes into the meeting.

The Committees plan to continue their discussion regarding cultural competency and anti-racism strategy at their next meeting on December 15th.

Sign up for School Committee News

Individuals who are interested in knowing more about the role of the School Committees as well as receiving the latest updates on school budgets and informational events are encouraged to enroll in the "School Committee News" Subscriber List. These updates will include timely information such as meeting dates and agendas, minutes, event announcements, and the School Committee Report. Individuals can sign up at www.concordps.org/school_committee_subscriber_list. Individuals interested in the Concord Middle School Building Committee (a Town of Concord Committee) can find updates and all relevant materials at <https://www.concordps.org/cms-building-project/cms-building-committee-updates/>

The School Committees Contact Information

You can link to the School Committees' emails on the Districts' home page at www.concordps.org. Or, you can email the Concord Public School Committee at concordschoolcommittee@concordps.org and the Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committee at concordcarliseschoolcommittee@concordps.org. You can reach out to the Superintendent and the School Committees through the Your Voice Matters link on the Districts' home page. Interested individuals are encouraged to sign up for the School Committees subscriber's list which is also on the District's web page.