



Board of Education Administrative Report

Title of Report: Diversity & Equity Council Update

Board Meeting Date: October 26, 2020

Action

Report

Information

Discussion

Submitted by: Dina M. Senecal

Executive Summary

Somers Diversity & Equity Council

Purpose Statement:

Somers Public Schools is committed to cultivating a just and fair learning community characterized by culturally responsive learners who embrace, accept and respect differences and perspectives. We endeavor to create opportunities for engagement, education and discourse related to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Essential Questions:

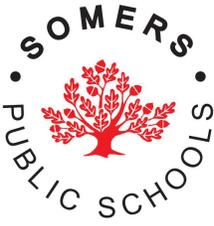
How does awareness, knowledge, and understanding of one's own racial and cultural identity promote effective teaching, leading, learning and acceptance?

How does awareness, knowledge and understanding of the racial, cultural, and sexual/gender identity of students and staff promote effective teaching, leading, learning, and harmonious co-existence?

How can we establish learning environments that are conscious of race, culture, and sexual/gender identity to ensure implementation of culturally responsive practices, policies, and procedures?

We are committed to:

- Reviewing and developing curricula to ensure cultural and historical accuracy.
- Encouraging educators to read texts that support racial bias reflection.
- Providing on-going professional development for all staff on implicit bias, anti-bias, and anti-racism
- Providing age-appropriate lessons for students on biases, acceptance, and anti-racism.
- Recruiting and hiring a diverse faculty and staff.
- Supporting Social Emotional Learning that promotes caring, inclusivity, tolerance and empathy.
- Providing opportunities for all to participate in "courageous conversations" relating to social justice.
- Supporting families with resources and materials relating to race and racism.



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Diversity & Equity Council Members

SES	Michael McDonnell	Jenny Devlin	Sarah Martin	Mike Clarity	Colleen Meier
MBA	Lynda Thorton	Sharon Walsh	Heather Connors	Kevin Nevins	Mike Szafir
SHS	Cheryl Gustafson	Suzy Williams	Linda Preston	Mary Curran	Kristin Angelica
District	Dina Senecal	Denise Messina			

As the new director of Curriculum and Instruction and the chair of the district’s Diversity and Equity Council, I wanted to begin the year by gathering information about the previous and on-going work of this council.

Over the summer, I met with Superintendent Czapla to discuss the work of this council as well as recent events. Together, the Superintendent and I updated the Diversity and Equity Status Report and compiled initial thoughts around potential activities and professional development. Additionally, I researched and enrolled in professional development on becoming anti-racist as well as created the Diversity & Equity website.

October 6, 2020:

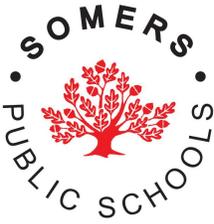
We convened the first Diversity and Equity Council meeting of the school year. We shared the work that was done, and discussions that were had over the summer. Together we discussed “next steps” of the team.

October 21, 2020:

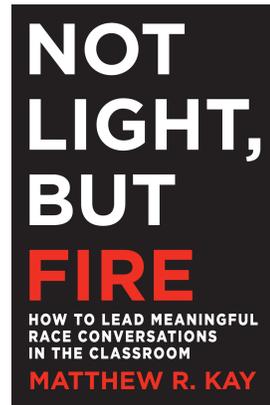
“Mind the Gap” presentation Understanding Learning Difficulties for Students Outside of “the Majority” at SHS and MBA. Suzy Williams and Sharon Walsh presented information to the staff in their respective buildings.

The Diversity and Equity Council will meet monthly throughout the 2020-2021 school year. Part of this year’s focus will be a book study of Not Light, But Fire by: Matthew R. Kay.

From the book study, we will create and facilitate building based professional for development for teachers related to the topics discussed in the book.



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Book Synopsis:

Do you feel prepared to initiate and facilitate meaningful, productive dialogues about race in your classroom? Are you looking for practical strategies to engage with your students?

Inspired by Frederick Douglass's abolitionist call to action, “it is not light that is needed, but fire” Matthew Kay has spent his career learning how to lead students through the most difficult race conversations. Kay not only makes the case that high school classrooms are one of the best places to have those conversations, but he also offers a method for getting them right, providing candid guidance on:

- How to *recognize* the difference between meaningful and inconsequential race conversations.
- How to *build* conversational “safe spaces,” not merely declare them.
- How to *infuse* race conversations with urgency and purpose.
- How to *thrive* in the face of unexpected challenges.
- How administrators might *equip* teachers to thoughtfully engage in these conversations.

With the right blend of reflection and humility, Kay asserts, teachers can make school one of the best venues for young people to discuss race.