

Gardner Public Schools Racial Justice Forum Part 1: Questions and Answers from the Panel

Is the school administration going to follow up this discussion panel with other discussions, peer training, or other types of support for allies and students of color?

Yes. A diverse equity committee of staff, students, families, and community members will be formed to plan our initial steps to:

- *Work to create a culture of inclusion and dignity in our school community;*
- *Keep the conversation going through public events;*
- *Evaluate our literature and curriculum;*
- *Identify goals, and track relevant data that will hold the schools and district accountable; and,*
- *Implement programs to intentionally disrupt racism.*

Will there be a person of color (POC) on the Equity Team, not just sharing but working on these concerns?

Yes. We will be sure to have a diverse group of stakeholders participating in the continuation of the initial forum, as well as the standing Equity Team. Ultimately, the hope is to have the panelists from the first event continue to be part of this important work moving forward.

How will the district quantify outcomes from this work?

The Equity Team will make those determinations. Our goals need to embrace multiple perspectives to prioritize and develop monitoring and response strategies.

How are staff/teachers taught to build trust with students, but also held accountable for racial injustices in Gardner Public Schools?

We have continued to educate our administrators and staff to move along the cultural proficiency continuum, and have specific policies around staff conduct. Insensitive and ignorant statements will not be tolerated and have been addressed before. More work needs to be done to make sure students have an adult they can trust enough to come forward, without fear, to voice their concerns.

We have moved this work far in the past several years. Our mission holds all of us accountable: That adults will respond in ways that foster positive, supportive relationships is at its core, and make over time will help our children feel safe and included. We have used this in professional development, as well as an expectation to which we can hold all GPS staff accountable. This is embedded in the evaluation process. Egregious behavior results in disciplinary actions, up to and including termination.

How is the district working to create an equitable educational experience for ALL students?

The state has recognized us for our progress in this area. In our schools, discipline for non-violent behaviors are addressed in alternative ways to suspension or traditional disciplinary

actions. Suspension rates in the district have plummeted by design, specifically as a way to address disciplinary disparities between white students and students of color. Last year was the first year that our Hispanic/Latinx students were suspended at a lower rate than our white students (1.6% compared with 1.2%); in the same year, only one black student (out of 75) was suspended, and only 2 of the students the state categorizes as “Multi-race, Non-Hispanic/Latinx,” were suspended (out of 175). It should be noted that students with special needs were suspended at a rate of 2.4%, which is almost double the suspension rate of all students. [Click here](#) to see the state’s annual report on discipline in Gardner.

How do we balance not wanting to suspend students while still holding disruptive or aggressive behavior to account?

Suspensions have not been proven as an effective deterrent to recurrence of behaviors. We utilize a proven system that effectively addresses behaviors, while reducing the need for suspensions--Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Although this has been in our schools for several years, it has taken a lot of work to have a culturally responsive PBIS system. Now, through Restorative Justice, students are taught to understand how their behaviors impact others, and we work to repair the relationship with those impacted, and the student. We also then work with the staff to analyze what was happening in the instruction and activities, to see if we can plan activities better to avoid future disruptions. This has been highly effective to reduce misbehavior.

How will the curriculum at Gardner Public Schools be modified to reflect the history of all races and cultures?

Curriculum work will be an important part of a multi-pronged approach addressed by the Equity Team, with input from not only those panelists that regularly attend meetings, but also from other stakeholders in the community.

Will the district be providing materials to implement the No Place for Hate Program across all schools?

Yes. GPS will be following through with NO PLACE FOR HATE as one initiative to address racism. We are partnering with ADL to help with the implementation.

Are there currently any proactive, intentional strategies to diversify GPS staff in order to match the demographic of our students?

Yes. We are currently working with Boston College’s Lynch Leadership Academy on a leadership pipeline. One of the strategies of the pipeline is to recruit, support, and retain people of color as professional employees of the district. We are just beginning this partnership. They have access to resources that will help recruit a more diverse workforce. Although we are the lead district, we are working in collaboration with Fitchburg, Leominster, and Winchendon Public Schools to ensure that this work is felt regionally and creates lasting change across the state.

Additional Information from our partners:

ADL Anti-Bias Training Programs for Educators

ADL sponsors professional development anti-bias training programs for administrative leadership teams and for PreK – 12 staff, consisting of half-day sessions (one to three hours) or full-day sessions (more than three hours and up to seven hours) for groups of 15 – 40 people with two ADL training consultants per group to co-facilitate the activities and discussions.

Each professional development training program is individually designed utilizing a primary needs assessment and a pre-workshop questionnaire to address participants' professional development needs. These needs often include 1) establishing a shared understanding of the different forms of bias (e.g., explicit, implicit, the "isms"), their personal and systemic manifestations, and their impact on staff, students and their families; 2) developing effective bias incident intervention and prevention strategies; and 3) identifying actionable next steps to facilitate more inclusive and equitable classrooms and school communities.

Based on our experience in working with hundreds of schools across New England, we have found that two sequential half-day training sessions allow for a more expansive and in-depth examination of the complex subject matter as well as more time to process it. Due to COVID-related concerns, all ADL training programs will be delivered remotely through summer 2021.

Anti-Bias Curriculum Resources for Educators

Districts and schools can purchase ADL's anti-bias curriculum guides for teachers to use in the classroom. Detailed information on the guides, which are designed for elementary school (K-5), middle school (6-8), and high school (9-12), can be accessed on ADL's website. ADL also provides free anti-bias lesson plans for K - 12 which can be downloaded via our website. The lesson plans can be filtered by topic and grade level. Additionally, ADL publishes a comprehensive online bibliography of children's literature for K-12, Books Matter, which can be filtered by topic. ADL's online resource, Table Talk: Family Conversations About Current Events, provides parents and caregivers with guidance to facilitate conversations with children on topics pertaining to social justice.

ADL also offers a free online civics curriculum for middle and high school educators to incorporate in their work with students, Strengthening Our Democracy: Civic Participation in the 21st Century. The curriculum, which can be accessed on ADL's website, focuses on six civic themes: A Civic Mindset,

Strengthening Democracy, Power and Privilege, Social Justice and Civil Rights, Identity and Membership, and Media Literacy.

ADL's Peer Training Program

For middle and high school students, ADL sponsors the Peer Training Program (grades 7-12 with middle school students and high school students in the same district trained separately). The Program, which was featured in an NPR “All Things Considered” segment, “Fighting Hate in Schools,” provides a diverse group of 25 – 30 students who represent their school’s demographics with anti-bias training to lead developmentally appropriate activities and discussions with their peers on explicit and implicit bias pertaining to race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, culture, ability and other aspects of human identity. Participants also develop safe and practical prevention and response strategies to address prejudicial behaviors, including the ways in which young people can become allies for peers who are targeted.

The Peer Training Program, which is certified by the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices, operates in more than 100 middle and high schools across New England (attached please find the researched-based evaluation that was published in the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology).

Please note that ADL hopes to be able to implement the program in additional schools in fall 2021, when the program can be delivered on-site.

The Peer Training Program consists of the following components:

1. ADL’s Peer Training Summer Institute for teachers, counselors, and administrators who will be serving as program advisors in their schools. The Summer Institute provides participants with the opportunity to experientially examine ADL’s anti-bias curriculum and resources and identify best practices in Peer Training Program implementation and management, including 1) the integration of the Program within a school’s existing operational framework; 2) the recruitment of student peer leaders; and 3) the design of peer leader-facilitated workshop agendas to address school climate issues.
2. Eighteen hours of interactive anti-bias education and facilitator skill-building training per school for a diverse group of 25 – 30 students who have been selected to serve as peer leaders. At the high school level (grades 9 – 12), the 18 hours are divided into three 6.5-hour sessions. At the middle school level (grades 7 and 8), the 18 hours are divided into four 4.5-hour sessions). All sessions are facilitated by highly experienced A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute training consultants. During the training sessions, which Program Advisors observe, peer leaders 1) engage in curriculum-based activities on bias-related issues and topics (such as bullying and cyberbullying, as well as manifestations of the different “-isms” such

as racism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, religious bigotry, etc.); 2) learn conflict management as well as intervention and prevention strategies; and 3) develop presentation and facilitation skills.

3. Weekly meetings for peer leaders with their Program advisors. The cadre of student peer leaders meets weekly for one to two hours with their Program Advisors to review and practice co-facilitating the anti-bias curriculum. When they are fully prepared, usually about 6 - 8 weeks following the initial training sessions, the trained students lead activity- and discussion -based workshops throughout the academic year to empower other students in their school, including those in lower grade levels, to recognize and address all forms of prejudice and discrimination and to actively promote respect for human differences.

4. A three-hour professional development training for all faculty and staff. Professional development at participating schools provides faculty and staff with strategies and resources to increase awareness of personal bias, foster a bias-free learning environment, and support the peer leaders' efforts to facilitate positive social change.

5. A two-hour presentation for parents/caregivers of all students in the school community. The presentation provides participants with strategies to increase awareness of personal bias and foster a bias-free home environment.

6. Six hours of on-site technical assistance. Each participating school is eligible to receive assistance to help implement the Program's operational components; provide peer leaders with additional training on a bias- or diversity -related issue; and/or additional facilitator skill development.

No Place for Hate Initiative

No Place for Hate (NPFH) provides PreK – 12 schools with a framework to organize school-wide initiatives that build safe, inclusive and equitable communities; empower staff, students and their families to take a stand against all forms of hate; and communicate a clear, unified message that all students have a place where they belong. There is no fee for districts and their schools to participate.

To qualify as No Place for Hate, each participating school is required to incorporate the following:

A committee that involves students in the planning and implementation of a virtual activity which 1) addresses bias-related topics and issues that pertain to the school; 2) engages all students in active learning and discussion; and 3)

promotes inclusion, equity and community building. Members of a participating school also sign No Place for Hate's pledge to affirm their shared commitment to address all forms of bias and prejudice, actively promote inclusion and equity, and support individuals and groups that are targeted with hate (please see attached NPFH guide).

Below please find the registration link and information on the No Place for Hate implementation process.

1. Schools register for NPFH at the link here. Once registered, ADL will send schools a Google folder to track their work throughout the year.
2. Form a Committee. Each registered school selects a coalition of students, at least two faculty and staff members, administrators and family members to lead its No Place for Hate efforts throughout the year to promote respect, equity and inclusion for all. Once committee members have been identified, schools register them here.
3. Sign the NPFH Pledge. All students and staff sign the No Place for Hate Pledge as proof of their commitment to doing their part to make their schools No Place for Hate. The signing can be done virtually or through individual classroom projects. Copies can be sent home to parents and family members with an explanation of the initiative and an invitation for families to sign the copies as well!
4. Schools submit an activity proposal for a virtual school-wide activity. The proposal should be designed to enhance students' understanding of diversity, bias, social justice and inclusion.
5. Implement the activities. Once the proposed activities have been approved by ADL, they can be launched!
6. Submit the paperwork. At the end of the year, schools submit all the required paperwork (e.g., activity forms, pledge signatures, lesson plans, photos, videos, etc.) as proof of completion. Schools will then be certified "NO PLACE FOR HATE!"