

Samantha Lovering and Jeneaa Duddie

Diversity and Inclusion Program (DIP) Report

The purpose of this Board of Education program is to reflect upon and inform the Board about student perspective in all of the Colchester Public Schools. The ultimate goal of the program is to help promote the awareness of different students' backgrounds to the Board and the district as a whole. Since introducing this program to the board in September, we have held diversity and inclusion meetings in two schools: Bacon Academy and William J. Johnston Middle School. These two meetings offered insight into the schools and allowed students to express their strong feelings about certain topics that aren't usually highlighted.

The program overall is being lead by Jeneaa Duddie and Samantha Lovering with help from the rest of Bacon Academy Student Council. The members of Student Council seem excited about the project, and have split into committees for each different school. For the William J. Johnston meeting there were 7 members from Student Council present to help control the conversation and pose questions to the students.

In September, Jeneaa and I held the first DIP meeting at Bacon Academy. We started with an open-ended question that quickly, however the meeting went on to be led by the students present at the meeting. Because this was our first meeting, it was expected that we would not get the largest crowd. While there were students that did show up (three not including Jeneaa and I), we learned that we needed to work on advertising the program and engaging students for it—especially in the high school. Looking back, the time period of the meeting could've been placed at a better spot; having the meeting during first block, or any academic block, immediately eliminates a demographic of students who can't miss class. In the future we discussed that having the meeting during advisory would be best because it would not conflict with any academic periods. Furthermore, Jeneaa and I have discussed more ways of

advertising the program for the next meeting to help increase the number of participating students. Some include making posters, putting it in the announcements, as well as asking teachers to be on the lookout for students who they think would be interested in participating.

There were two issues that we felt were persistent throughout the conversation at Bacon Academy, the amount of school unity currently present at Bacon Academy and the treatment of students according to what level they are placed in academically (L1, L2, Honors, AP). As for school unity, this meeting took place before spirit week, an event that usually unifies the student body. Over the past few years students all around have felt the lack of school spirit to a certain extent. There's no quick fix to helping with school unity, but it should be brought to light that students feel that our school isn't as close knit as it maybe once was. Students also seemed to feel that there was a level of preferential treatment given to upper level students, AP and Honors students seemed to held at a higher regard. While there is also no quick fix to this, it's important that the Board and teachers in the school are aware that some students feel that are being treated differently based on academic level.

This month we held our William J. Johnston meeting on November 13th. The meeting had great attendance with around 15 students from the 8th grade, 10 students from the 7th grade, and 25 students from the 6th grade present at the meeting. No matter the grade, the students seemed concerned about similar issues, but overall felt that the school was a positive, inclusive space for everyone.

One of the main topics brought up was the scheduling of classes and how the students felt about their personal schedule. Students seemed to have an overall consensus that they would prefer to have workshop at the end of the day. They believe that this would be helpful because then, they could speak to their specials teachers along with their regular team teachers. Students also felt that transition time needed to be increased so they could get to

their classes on time easier. The newer class of innovations seemed to spark conversation between all students. Some students loved it and felt that it helped with their team building skills and creativity however, others felt that there were too few projects and the class moved slowly.

Student- teacher relationships were also a large topic that all three of the grade levels touched upon. Sixth and seventh felt that the student- teacher relationship was very positive and had nothing but good things to say about almost all of their teachers. The sixth graders said that science was challenging, but fun and that the math curriculum was really new and interesting. The 8th graders had a much different take on the student- teacher relationships formed in their grade. Jenaea and myself pressed the students to continue on with this issue and they seemed to say that there has been less and less respect given to them throughout the year from their teachers. They would eventually go on to say that this had happened primarily because of students. Certain students hadn't shown their teachers respect so, eventually the respect that the teachers had for the students began to falter. The issue of favoritism towards certain students came up again in 8th grade and echoed concern from those who felt it at Bacon Academy.

Jenaea and I are very excited about the continuation of the program. We have learned that advertising is key and getting the word out to teachers helps with recruitment of students. It's also important to get a well rounded group of students so there are different opinions said throughout the conversation.