FAIRFIELD
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

1-6-2021 BOE Special Meeting Agenda
8:00 PM (Virtual)

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Board of Education Special Meeting Agenda
Wednesday, January 6, 2021 (Virtual)
8:00 PM

1. Call to Order of the Special Meeting and Roll Call

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Business Items
   A. Presentation: Teacher Anti-Racism Survey Results, Fairfield Equity Coalition
   (Enclosure No. 1)

   B. Superintendent Report: Emergency Closure Policy - Update

4. Adjournment

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**PROMOTING ANTI-RACISM AND RACIAL EQUITY IN FAIRFIELD
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

REPORT

To be presented to

THE FAIRFIELD BOARD OF EDUCATION
Riverview Plaza, 501 Kings Highway East
Fairfield, Connecticut 06825

By the

FAIRFIELD EQUITY COALITION

To be scheduled for the first week of January 2021

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Contents

Executive Summary

The items listed below are the ten Actionable Changes meticulously crafted and reinforced through intensive exploration of the leading academic research on racial equity and anti-racism in education. Making up the bulk of our report, these Actionable Changes are broad recommendations submitted to the Fairfield Board of Education for the explicit purpose of advancing anti-racism and racial equity in all facets of Fairfield's public education system. Each Actionable Change is its own section of this report, beginning with the direct perspectives of FPS students, faculty, and staff compiled through our own survey work, followed by the relevant research that supports the adoption of the Actionable Change. Finally, each section will include specific sub-recommendations that offer tangible actions to achieve the larger goal of the Actionable Change. Actionable Change No. 10 is unique from the first nine in that it provides logistical guidance - like funding mechanisms, suggested implementation timelines, and accountability measures - so the preceding Actionable Changes can be put into practice.

1. Ensure curricula for all grade levels prioritizes cultural and racial diversity by amplifying representative perspectives and experiences of historically marginalized groups.

2. Implement mandatory anti-racism, implicit bias, and restorative justice training led by independent professionals for all faculty and staff on a frequent and ongoing basis.

3. Implement mandatory presentations, courses, and training across all grade levels where students will learn about the social construction of racial and cultural identity and its influence on themselves and others.

4. Recruit, hire, and retain racially diverse, culturally competent school faculty and staff.

5. Redesign the pathways to success to meet the needs of all students and ensure that race, socioeconomic status, etc. will not predict any student's educational outcome.

6. Reimagine discipline systems by shifting towards restorative practices and invest in resources that will support and empower all students.

7. Create an explicit, district-wide anti-racism policy and establish a community-based restorative justice committee to prevent and repair harm in cases of discrimination and harassment in FPS.

8. Develop opportunities for cross-cultural and cross-racial collaboration through extracurricular activities within and outside of the Fairfield community.

9. Create a permanent, diverse committee of trained students, parents, faculty, and relevant professionals to inform Fairfield Public School's future curricular and policy decisions relating to race and equity.

10. Establish a detailed, measurable plan for implementation of the Actionable Changes of this report and maintain a direct, transparent channel of communication regarding progress.

Introduction

Fairfield Equity Coalition Background
Fairfield Equity Coalition (FEC) is a youth-led organization taking local action to reimagine Fairfield's definition of what constitutes a comprehensive education. Our goal is to push for equitable policy and curriculum changes within Fairfield Public Schools (FPS) while raising awareness on injustices against **marginalized populations** within our community.

In June of 2020, current students and alumni of FPS joined together to form this coalition with the hopes of fighting for **equity** within our curriculum and school system. At the height of our membership, FEC had over 80 general body members, each of whom contributing to one of our eleven committees: External Operations, Internal Operations, Publicity, Data, National and State Policy, Local Policy, Editorial, Civic Engagement, Countywide Collaboration, Longevity, and Recruitment. Our membership network is extensive, with members residing in states as far away as California and ranging in age from 15 to 27 years old. In the new year, we plan to grow in size and scope by inducting a new class of members that have sought admission since the summer. No matter our stage of life, we are united under the common goal of fostering equity both within FPS and in our community as a whole, starting with a focus on reducing racial inequity.

FEC exists alongside several other equity groups seeking similar educational reform, including Warde Voices for Equity and Ludlowe Youth for Equity, as well as the Fairfield Education Association (FEA) Anti-Racism Committee, and the many other factions of the Fairfield Equity Project.. To see a partial list of the organizations and people outside of FEC who helped with this report, view our Community Collaborators section.

Acknowledging Our Predecessors
As FEC begins its fight towards racial equity within the classroom setting, it is important to acknowledge the efforts that came before us. Beginning in 2017, high school students developed a social justice organization called the Fairfield Warde Achievement Gap ("Achievement Gap") to address systemic racism within education. While equity groups now exist at both Warde and Ludlowe, with Achievement Gap developing into the Fairfield Warde Voices for Equity (FWVE), and Ludlowe beginning Youth for Equity (YFE), the pleas of the founding Warde members went largely ignored by FPS administrators and leaders.

Achievement Gap became a successful student-led group independent from the school administration and general public. From the help of a small group of faculty, parents, and students, Achievement Gap created and presented four original professional development programs for FPS faculty. These innovative trainings were then presented by Achievement Gap members at the National High School Redesign Conference in San Diego, California, and two New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) educational conferences. Most importantly, Achievement Gap hosted three student-led statewide conferences around equity in education, the first of which included dialogue and presentations with Harding High School students from Bridgeport. Once again, these conferences were so successful that they were expanded to the graduate schools of Fairfield University (underwritten by the CT Writing

Project) and Southern Connecticut State University and attended by hundreds of students and teachers in the tri-state area. Achievement Gap additionally presented to other town organizations, like the Fairfield Rotary Club and Warde PTA, and was covered positively in the local press for their innovative work.

The above presentations were both designed and given by the high school students in Achievement Gap. These young activists decided to not only advocate in their immediate school community, but to collaborate locally and nationally with like-minded groups. These founding members made the difficult and brave decision to engage in work that, at the time, had never been done to this scale in Fairfield, and in doing so set the path for future anti-racist work in town like this present effort. We thank these trailblazing students for their vulnerability and foundational work.

Despite Achievement Gap's national success, its largest obstacle remained within FPS itself. Students had to work with select administrators in order to receive a platform to present their findings and meetings after school, as they were not permitted to do so during school hours as a formal club. Their mission and recommendations were often met with little moral or financial support. District administration officials sidestepped several attempts to implement Achievement Gap's work into FPS directly; training in and education on systemic racism and its remedies remained at the bottom of the priority list. The preceding FPS administration hired a retired administrator as a consultant to educate faculty on racial disparities and equity concerns, as well as support Achievement Gap members at the 2018 NEASC conference, but this support was discontinued under the new district administration.

FEC strongly believes that our work was made possible in large part due to the efforts of Achievement Gap, FWVE, LYE, and the many students that came before us. Several of the leaders from these earlier groups maintained their resolve and joined FEC in our present fight for racial equity. We are grateful that FPS and our Fairfield community are now eager to engage in these hard and complex discussions around reform; however, we felt it important to acknowledge the people and groups who engaged in this work long before it was politically advantageous to do so. We thank our predecessors for beginning this effort, and we hope to help advance this cause for many years to come.

A Note on Intersectionality
When we speak of the ways in which structures of power shape the experiences of those within our community, rarely is it in reference to a single element of one's identity. To study these interactions in a vacuum not only over-simplifies the lived experiences of traditionally marginalized groups, it stratifies the conversation in such a way where we are unable to fully realize our own shared humanity. For example, talking about women's rights, racial equity, and trans rights separately ignores the unique intersection of oppression that Black trans women experience, which is distinct as compared to the experiences of Black cis women, non-Black cis women, and non-Black trans women. This practice of seeing, understanding, and coming to value the entirety of another human being is not merely a courtesy, but rather the single-most-important prerequisite for cultivating a more just and equitable society. Therefore, while this report addresses the equity gap in FPS specifically through the lens of race, the broader efforts towards equity encompass many more identities and factors. If we wish to create truly sustainable and inclusive change within the FPS system, we must consider the entirety of one's identity, and the interplay between identity markers. This means that together we must examine how class, gender,

sexual orientation, religion, ability, and other factors influence how students see themselves in relation to established systems and institutions.

We plan to address these additional factors in future reports and conversations. It is worth noting that many of the recommendations mentioned in this report can apply to those categories as well; for example, hiring more **LGBTQIA+** staff, reading LGBTQIA+ authors in English classes, learning about LGBTQIA+ figures in history classes, learning about microaggressions against members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and having a discrimination committee investigate claims of harassment against LGBTQIA+ students and staff. Though future reports and conversations will further outline more specifically how existing recommendations apply to these groups, and other unique ones that can be added, we urge FPS to consider including other marginalized groups in the structural changes we are proposing in this report.

What is Racism?

Many social justice advocates categorize oppression into four categories: ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized ([Northeastern School of Law, 2017](#)). These categories are easily applied to racial oppression.

Ideological oppression is the root of all other forms of oppression. Ideological oppression begins with the idea that one group is somehow better than another, with the dominant group associating positive qualities to itself and negative qualities to the marginalized group. For example, the idea that Black people are generally dangerous, and White people tend to be more civilized, is a form of ideological racism.

This mindset leads to institutional oppression, which describes how systems and institutions engrain and manifest this dominant ideology. Institutions control individuals' access to certain resources and opportunities. For example, hiring less of and/or devaluing BIPOC staff as compared to White staff is a form of institutional racism.

Together, these forces influence interpersonal oppression; the way that people play out discrimination and violence against one another. This can take the form of microaggressions, jokes, stereotypes, and harassment. For example, asking a BIPOC student where they are *really* from, or making fun of their hair or skin, is a form of interpersonal racism.

Finally, these dimensions all lead to internalized oppression, which is when marginalized people internalize narratives of their own inferiority. This allows oppression to perpetuate itself, as it gets reinforced by those experiencing it. It is important to note that this internalized racism is not the fault of the individual but a natural byproduct of facing negative stereotypes, low expectations, and discrimination on a regular basis.

Together, these forces act to embed oppression, racial and otherwise, into our society and lives. For a video further expanding on these forces, see [Legos and the 4 I's of Oppression](#).

It is critical to understand that all of these oppressive forces can and often do exist without explicit or conscious intention; one can be consciously fond of or neutral towards people who are different from them and yet still unconsciously participate in systems and commentary that is oppressive. Therefore, we ask the reader of this report to fend off the inclination to respond defensively to these difficult topics. Unlearning racist and oppressive language, curricula, and systemic practices is something we all must do, and is a life-long learning process; no one, including our coalition members, is exempt from this responsibility. Acknowledging where we have room to grow does not mean labeling ourselves as evil or awful, despite the weighted connotation that words like 'racism' can have. In fact, were the students and alumni writing this report to believe our readership to be evil, there would be no point in publishing this work. It is *because* FPS has equipped us with the critical thinking skills, commitment to knowledge and scholarship, and trust in our staff and administrators to listen to us, that we felt able to begin this conversation. We hope that our research and recommendations serve as a testament to our faith in progress, instead of as attacks on our readers' intentions or character.

Addressing COVID-19
Few events in recent history will rival the far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 crisis. As we write this report, we are aware of this larger context in which it is being received. Over the last few months, our town has experienced great loss of livelihood and life itself. In the face of such hardship, FPS faculty and staff have worked tirelessly in planning for the return of students for in-person instruction. For this we offer our sincere gratitude; their work to ensure a safe and nurturing educational experience moving forward will not go unnoticed. As we continue this process of rebuilding, we must come together as a town to assess what was lost to the pandemic and the ways in which it has exacerbated previously existing inequities within and throughout FPS ([LaFave, 2020](#)). Preparing for the school year in light of the virus presents a unique opportunity to re-evaluate the status quo and outline a roadmap for change that accurately represents the needs and interests of all community members.

Understandably, it may be tempting to work on COVID-19 preparations first and anti-racism later. However, it should be noted that the Coronavirus pandemic and racism are inextricably linked; one cannot be addressed without the other in mind. Given that the pandemic disproportionately affects marginalized racial groups ([Don Bambino et.al, 2020](#)), it is imperative that FPS considers racial inequity as it pertains to back-to-school preparations as well. Changes like providing affinity-based counseling, trauma support, and representative curricula which highlight the institutionally racist structures that have led and perpetuated the disproportionate suffering of these groups are especially critical during this time.

After all, racism, [on all levels,](#) is pervasive in every system and harms the entirety of the community. As tempting as it may be to separate anti-racist work into a postponable objective, it simply cannot wait any longer.

Community Collaborators
FEC stands amongst a vast network of changemakers and visionaries who have personally and collectively committed to bringing about racial healing, reconciliation, and justice in the Town of Fairfield. While our mission and approach to advancing equitable policy and curriculum change within FPS is unique, we recognize and honor the larger, shared vision that continues to inspire the advancement

of racial justice work here in Fairfield and beyond. In an attempt to best cater to the needs of the community and work within the existing channels of change where appropriate, FEC continues to engage with a wide array of community collaborators who informed, in part, the content of this report. Listed below are some of the names of those who offered their perspective to help advance this cause. We thank them for their time and insight.

Dana Bossio, *School Psychology and Social Work*
Elizabeth Cerny, *Guidance Counselor at Fairfield Woods Middle school*
Ashley Crowe, *Artist*
Mike Cummings, *Superintendent of Fairfield Public Schools*
Colleen Deasy, *Executive Director of Personnel and Legal Services*
Heather Delsole, *The Fairfield Education Association Anti Racism Committee, Co-chair of the Alumni Connections/Support*
Tom Flynn, *Concerned Citizen*
Jessica Gerber, *Parent*
Carol Guernsey, *Parent*
Vicki Hastings, *The Fairfield Education Association Anti-Racism Committee, Co-chair of the Alumni Connections/Support*
Greg Hatzis, *Principal at Fairfield Ludlowe High School*
Mary Hogue, *Activist*
Sarah Huntington, *Teacher at Fairfield Ludlowe High School*
Ishita Jamar, *Cofounder of Valley for Change*
Sara Kempner, *AP Government Teacher*
Jahnavi Kirtane, *Member of Valley for Change*
Reini Knorr, *Parent*
Jennifer Leeper, *Frmr. Board of Education Member, State Representative-elect for the 132 District*

Nancy Lefkowitz, *Selectwoman*
Chris Lyddy, *Chief of Police*
Jim Marren, *Fairfield resident, parent, President, Tiller, LLC.*
Cristin McCarthy-Vahey, *State Representative for the 133rd District*
Molly McHugh, *Physical Education teacher at Fairfield Woods Middle School, Parent*
Zakia Parris, *Executive Director of Operations and Processes*
Deirdra Preis, *Educational Equity Consultant*
Renee Simpson, *Library Paraprofessional and Member of Fairfield Warde Voice of Equity*
Bob Smoler, *President of the Fairfield Education Association (FEA)*
Rabab Hussain Syed, *Parent*
Scott Thompson, *Chair of Sustainable Fairfield Task Force*
John Whaley, *Teacher at Fairfield Warde High School*
Fairfield CARES, *Local Prevention Council*
FEA Anti-Racism Committee, *Teacher Organization*

Limitations of this Report

As hopeful as the contents of this report may be, it is imperative to acknowledge the inevitable limitations that it possesses. For one, FEC only formed this past summer; we cannot hope to dismantle generations of deeply entrenched racial inequities in the span of six months of research and conversation. Few coalition members, furthermore, are professionally trained in anti-racism educational reform. As such, we are the first to admit our policy recommendations are imperfect positions that will likely be refined over time. Finally, because FEC is composed of current and former FPS students, we are a majority-White coalition. While FEC is intentionally structured as BIPOC-led, we by no means expect these members to speak

comprehensively on behalf of their identity group, and as such our research and recommendations will likely hold inevitable biases.

With all this in mind, we hope that this report serves as a starting point for an ongoing conversation about how FPS can increase equity amongst all of its members. FEC urges all readers of this report —staff, administrators, parents, community members, and others alike— to reach out to us with any and all feedback you can provide. Tell us what problems and obstacles we failed to foresee; what resources or further Actionable Changes you have to add; what further research and reporting we can provide to help move this work forward; anything at all you see fit. To contact us, please fill out this Report Feedback Form.

Defining Terms

Although we hope all of the definitions below will provide clarity to the terms and concepts in this report, the seven terms at the beginning of this section are the most important to understand and are referenced most often in the report. Any time a term defined in this section is first used in the other sections of the report, it will be in emboldened text.

Key Terms
- **Anti-racism:** The *active* process of recognizing, challenging, and changing the individual attitudes and prejudices, and systemic policies, of racism (Smithsonian, 2020). Anti-racist work involves an awareness of power imbalances and advocacy for policies that redistribute power and reduce racial inequity (ACLRC, 2020).
- **BIPOC**: An acronym that refers to Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (Lorde, 2020). A term which strives to honor and include the narratives of Black and Indigenous peoples, which have historically been erased (MHA, 2020) (Garcia, 2020) and differ from the experiences of other people of color.
- **Cultural competency**: A set of behaviors and attitudes that enable people to effectively navigate situations in which individuals of different backgrounds are present (NCCC, 2004). Cultural competency develops a desire to seek out different perspectives and can be realized in both students and teachers (NCCC, 2004).
- **Decolonization of curricula**: The effort to dismantle colonial practices in educational institutions, reflect on what narratives are prioritized, and validate the diverse identities of students (UVIC, 2009). Decolonization requires the restructuring of the Eurocentric curriculum and institutionalized power dynamics (NCTE, 2019).
- **Racial Equity**: The work to reform policies, practices, and structures so that racial identity will no longer predict one's outcome in life (Racial Equity Resource Guide, 2020). Racial equity strives for fairness, not equal treatment, and involves creating opportunities for shared power and decision-making. Just as differential outcomes by race is a component of systemic racism, racial equity is a component of anti-racism (Bailey, 2020).
- **Implicit bias**: Subconscious attitudes or stereotypes toward others based on characteristics such as race and ethnicity, which can affect the understanding, actions, and decision-making of an individual (Dunham, Et al. 2015). These associations are pervasive and develop over the course

of a lifetime, and therefore must be mitigated through intentional unlearning and introspection (Kirwan, 2015).

- **Restorative justice**: A holistic approach to discipline which engages all parties impacted by an issue or behavior to repair harm and communicate about potential solutions (Center For Justice and Reconciliation, 2020). Restorative practices represent a community philosophy in contrast to punishments, which often make no effort toward restitution and remove offenders from the conversation (Payne, Welch, 2013).

Important Terms

- **Affinity-based counseling**: A form of counseling wherein students and counselors share a common background or identity, which provides emotional support for the student and allows them to construct identities independent of the larger community (Berndt, 2016).

- **De-escalation training**: Tactics which aim to resolve a conflict or argument and prevent physical harm for both the students who become distraught and the teachers seeking to manage the situation (Kerns, 2007). The techniques learned, such as actively listening to the student, empathizing with them in their time of stress, and opening lines of communication, can help to prevent physical confrontation (Kerns, 2007).

- **Marginalized groups**: Groups or communities subject to discrimination and exclusion, due to the intersection of social, political, cultural and economic factors (EIGE, 2020). As such, these groups encounter significant disparities in access to services, legal rights, and other areas, formed on unequal power relationships (Garrett, 2020). This classification is not homogeneous and each individual may experience discrimination from multiple dimensions of their identity (Right To Education, 2020).

- **Microaggressions**: Commonplace interactions or behaviors that convey bias toward marginalized groups (Limbong, 2020). These intentional or unintentional interactions are often subtle but constitute insensitivity, hostility, and discrimination toward BIPOC individuals (Deangilis, 2009). They contain hidden assumptions and messages that invalidate the experiences of BIPOC individuals or demean their identity.

- **Social-emotional learning**: The process through which students can develop pro-social behaviors like empathy, set and achieve positive goals, develop an awareness of self and others, establish and maintain healthy relationships, engage in responsible decision making, and recognize and understand emotions (CASEL, 2020). SEL programming can increase academic achievement and improve behavior through coordination among educators, students, and community agencies (Weissberg, 2016).

- **Systemic racism:** A societal structuring of resources, power, and opportunity to the benefit of White people at the exclusion of BIPOC individuals (Racial Equity Tools, 2020). In contrast to individual discrimination and racial bias, systemic racism refers to the institutions and policies that reinforce hierarchies and differential outcomes based on race (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2020).

- **Privilege**: Benefits such as access to resources and power bestowed, consciously or unconsciously, to members of the dominant group and withheld to others such as BIPOC individuals (Nasp, 2020). Privilege is an unearned advantage, separate from an individual level of income or effort (Collins, 2018).

Additional Terms

- **Color blindness**: The ideology that society has moved beyond race and racism, and skin color does not impact interpersonal interactions or play into systematic policies ([Neville et al, 2016](#)). Proponents of the ideology maintain that they do not notice race, and therefore, do not act with racial bias ([Apfelbaum et al, 2012](#)).
- **Environmental racism:** The disproportionate impact of environmental hazards, such as pollution and toxic waste exposure, on low-income communities and BIPOC folks ([Greenaction, 2020](#)). These policies, practices, and directives stem from power dynamics at a government and corporate level ([Parr, 2020](#)).
- **False narrative**: Incorrect or incomplete portrayals of history and the present day, which can fuel stereotypes, ignore power structures and reinforce racial hierarchies in society ([Australian Human Rights Coalition 2017](#)). Many false narratives center on anti-Blackness and/or do not give a voice to marginalized groups ([Simmons, 2019](#)). Dismantling these narratives is a part of anti-racism.
- **Gentrification**: The transformation of neighborhoods from low to high economic value based on subjective economic factors tinged with racist conceptions ([CDC, 2009](#), [Richardson et al, 2019](#)). The rising rent, mortgages, and property taxes that accompany this change can cause displacement of the original residents, who can no longer afford to live there, shifting the racial and ethnic composition of the neighborhood ([Richardson et al, 2019](#)).
- **Growth mindset**: A growth mindset describes the mentality that intelligence is not static and can be developed and improved upon by any student with practice ([UConn, 2020](#)). This mentality contrasts with a fixed mindset, which views intelligence as unchangeable.
- **Latinx:** A gender neutral alternative to the traditional usage of Latino and Latina, which relate to people of Latin American origin or descent ([Central Washington University, 2020](#)).
- **LGBTQIA+:** An umbrella term that specifically refers to those who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual, but also the community as a whole ([UCDavis, 2020](#))
- **Mass Incarceration**: A result of the American criminal justice system that leads to the incarceration of a significant portion of the U.S. population, a disproportionate number of whom are Black and other people of color. Mass incarceration is perpetuated by excessive policing and policies that make it difficult for formerly incarcerated people to reintegrate back into society ([ACLU, 2020](#)).
- **Orientalist perspective**: The stereotyped perception of Asia as uncivilized or exotic, within the framework of colonialism ([Lexico, 2020](#)). This perspective reduces the diverse cultures and countries of Asia to a cohesive image of inferiority ([Sered, 2017](#)).
- **Police brutality**: The unlawful and/or excessive use of force by police against civilians that violates a person's rights. ([Amnesty International, 2020](#)).
- **Racialization**: The process of defining entire groups of individuals solely based on skin color, and assigning racial meaning to their identity ([University Of Winnipeg, 2020](#)). Racialization contributes to the development of individual racist beliefs, which have become amplified over time through the normalization of racial inequities in social structures and institutional systems ([Omi & Winant, 107](#)).
- **Racial trauma & racial battle fatigue**: Psychological, social, and physiological stress responses which result from the cumulative impact of racial microaggressions or other interactions. Black

people may experience these effects as they cope with everyday racism at historically White institutions (Gorski, 2018).

- **Redlining**: Racial discrimination in mortgage lending, in which applicants were denied a loan in certain neighborhoods (Federal Reserve, 2020). The term refers to the practice in which mortgage lenders would draw red lines around portions of a map to indicate neighborhoods they perceived as undesirable, often on the basis of racial and ethnic demographics (Jan, 2018). While the Fair Housing Act (History.com Editors, 2018) banned redlining, the practice has shaped the demographics of neighborhoods today.
- **Science identity**: A student's ability to align their personal cultural and racial background with their perception of the STEM field (Carelton, 2020).
- **Social determinants of health**: Conditions of birth and daily life, influenced by policies and systems, which affect a range of health risks and contribute to inequitable outcomes (WHO, 2020) (NEJM, 2017).
- **White Saviorism**: "Practices, processes, and institutions that reify historical inequities to ultimately validate White privilege." (Anderson, 2013). Saviorism mindsets result in individuals feeling that they are "doing good" by engaging in diversity and equity initiatives, rather than learning from the experience, investigating their own biases, and examining their own privilege (Aaronson, 2017).
- **Whitewashed**: A term that specifically refers to erasing Black representation in the media, but can also apply to academic contexts in which Black voices are not validated and topics such as White supremacy, racial discrimination, and racial violence are ignored (Milwaukee Independent, 2019).

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Survey Data

Survey Methodologies
The data collected by FEC for use in this report stem from three of out four anonymous surveys administered over the course of 2020 to both FPS teachers and staff and current and former students, respectively. The initial set of surveys (one for faculty and staff, the other for current and former students) was administered in late May of this year in response to the murder of George Floyd. Both surveys asked respondents a range of questions that, broadly speaking, can be categorized into two groups: questions about the ways in which race is taught in the classroom and questions about how incidents of racism are rectified in FPS. These surveys were intended to measure the FPS community's perspective on race as the anti-racism movement gained traction.

The first student survey was disseminated through the social media pages of its creators, primarily on Facebook and Instagram. Respondents were encouraged to share the survey with their FPS peers as much as possible, therefore, the survey likely traveled through various mediums. The final sample size of this first survey reached 380 respondents. Given that this survey was not administered in a structured way, the breakdown of respondents' attended schools was surprisingly even, with every school at each education level having roughly the same statistical representation in the sample size. Responses to this survey detailed elaborate qualitative responses, ranging from personal experiences of racism from a classmate or teacher to suggestions on how to promote anti-racism and racial equity.

It was only after this first student survey garnered so many responses did its original creators think to establish FEC and develop a report to share with the BOE and FPS officials the perspectives of its students. Because this survey was administered without an official intended use, it was not designed with the stringent requirements of academic research; namely, the survey did not ask for the informed consent of its respondents to publish its findings in our report. Out of an abundance of caution and respect for the privacy of the respondents, only the non-traceable, anonymized summary statistics from this first survey have been included in the report (which can be found under Student Survey One Results and in graphics throughout the report). The full results of this first student survey, therefore, will not be published separately like our other survey editions. Because FEC wished to include the powerful narrative responses that reflect students' personal experiences with racism in FPS, we developed a second student survey, this time eliciting the informed consent of its respondents, so these stories can center our recommendations around FPS students. This second student survey was administered once again through social media channels in late September (09/21/2020 - 09/27/2020) and garnered 36 responses. The narrative responses to this second survey have been organized by Actionable Change and can be found at the beginning of each section under "Student Perspectives".

What is your graduation class year?
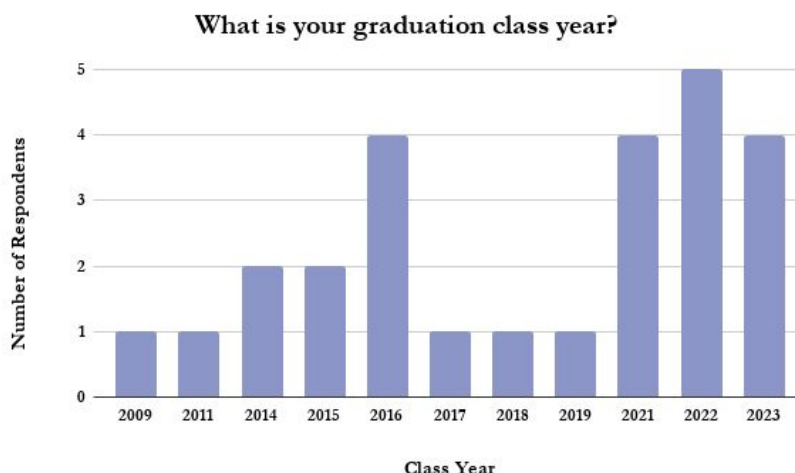
The above graphic depicts the distribution of graduation years of the respondents to the second student survey that opted to include this information.

The first teacher survey was disseminated through email. FEC retrieved the professional emails of teachers and staff from the contact lists made public on FPS websites. Recipients of our initial email request were additionally encouraged to share the survey with their colleagues. The final sample size of the first Teacher Survey was 100 respondents. Like the first student survey, this survey asked respondents about their experience with teaching race and/or handling incidents of racism, and how they see their role in promoting anti-racism and racial equity as a school official. Shortly after this survey was disseminated, FEC was made aware that we had unintentionally violated proper protocol concerning the administration of surveys using professional district emails. Not wanting to violate procedure, or estrange our working relationship with the district, we decided to omit these responses entirely and submit a new iteration of the teacher survey for official approval by the BOE and dissemination through proper district channels. Informed consent was also garnered in this second teacher survey. Upon its approval, Superintendent Cummings sent out a district-wide email to all faculty and staff on Tuesday, November 17th requesting everyone to respond to the survey (linked in email). The survey was open for the remainder of that week, closing on Saturday, November 21st. The final sample size of the second teacher survey was 134 respondents. Responses to this survey are dispersed throughout this report in the form of (1) summary statistics and (2) narrative quotations at the beginning of each Actionable Change under the section "Teacher Perspectives".

To promote readability, we have selected responses from the three surveys that we deemed most impactful and relevant to our recommendations; however, for the sake of transparency, both of the second versions of the student and teacher/staff surveys are published on our website for public viewing.

Student Survey One Results

The below section summarizes the results from our first student "Anti-Racism in Fairfield Public Schools" survey, highlighting the major themes drawn from the responses that then informed our Actionable Changes.

Changes to FPS Curricula
94% of respondents (267/284) reported that they were taught incomplete or **false narratives** in class during their time at FPS. Specifically, 63 out of 290 respondents mentioned Christopher Columbus, 18 out of 290 respondents mentioned structural/**systemic racism**, and 16 out of 290 respondents mentioned civil rights movement leaders as topics that were incompletely or incorrectly taught. Other examples of false narratives raised by respondents were the War on Drugs, South African apartheid, Black history outside of the Civil Rights Movement, **color blindness** and **microaggressions**.

When asked "which, if any, subject areas do you believe were inadequately covered during your time within FPS?," the most common topic mentioned by students (65/300) was the ongoing oppression of Black Americans and other **marginalized groups** (i.e. Indigenous people, people of color, and women). Additional sub-topics included the debate over reparations after the Civil War, **redlining**, **mass incarceration**, **police brutality**, the Black Lives Matter movement, **gentrification**, racial inequity in public health and education, and **environmental racism**.

The second most common topic mentioned (61/300) was better coverage of world history and/current events in countries outside of the U.S. and Europe. Continents most often mentioned included Africa, South America, and Asia. Other groups histories explicitly mentioned included Black history (43), and Indigenous history (30). For a more complete breakdown of groups mentioned in this survey question, see [Appendix I](#). When discussing these groups, many respondents emphasized a desire to talk about their history and culture *outside* of the narrative of oppression; i.e. pre/post slavery, pre/post colonization, pre/post genocide.

The third most common response (50/300) indicated a need to address the history and modern prevalence of topics like racism, bias, and **privilege** both on an interpersonal and institutional level. 33 respondents mentioned colonization (America's founding, its early history, and Columbus, as well as its modern imperialism of South America, the Middle East, and Vietnam) and how our contemporary capitalist systems perpetuate and exacerbate inequities from our global colonial past. 29 respondents emphasized not only *what* they wish were being taught, but also *how* it should be taught, calling for an increased diversity in perspectives in the literature, textbooks, sheet music, and other sources used to teach various subjects. Some explicitly expressed that this diversity is especially important when discussing narratives of oppression, which respondents thought should include the voices of the oppressed (e.g. BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, non-European, etc.) rather than just the oppressors' perspectives.

Many respondents also acknowledged that the scope of these conversations should extend beyond humanities courses. 27 respondents mentioned the need for integration of race and **equity** (alongside sexuality and gender studies) into all subject areas. 10 respondents expressed a need for these discussions to also be more present in Civics classes, including how to understand current events and injustices and ways to dismantle them. Finally, 6 respondents expressed an explicit need for **intersectionality** within the

curriculum, including the intersection between race, gender, sexuality (e.g. Black trans women) and race/class/environmental abuses (see A Note on Intersectionality).

When presented with the question, "what changes would you want to see made to the FPS curriculum?" 114 out of 217 students reported wanting to see a more historically accurate, less Eurocentric curriculum. When asked for suggestions about starting these conversations in schools at an earlier age, 226 out of 269 respondents voiced that anti-racist teachings need to be incorporated into early education. The necessity of this intervention is clear; for example, 58 out of 105 respondents felt that their high school English curriculum did not present a diverse enough range of voices and perspectives.

With regard to elective classes, 25% of respondents (67/281) were in favor of a Black studies course that incorporated topics pertaining to Mass Incarceration (56/281), experiences of ethnic diaspora (33/281), and civic engagement (49/281). Other elective courses respondents expressed interest in include Asian studies, Women studies, Queer studies, Indigenous studies, **Latinx** studies, and environmental racism.

Also worth noting, when presented with the open ended question "What other changes would you want to see throughout FPS curriculum?," 26 out of 217 student respondents specifically noted a desire for more diverse teachers and administrators. See Actionable Change No. 4 to read more about the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty.

Changes to Disciplinary Policies
When asked if students had witnessed racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher, peer, or administrator at FPS, 5 respondents described how BIPOC students were targeted or called out for "being loud" or not completing assignments while White students engaging in the same behavior were not. Respondents felt that discriminatory and/or prejudiced events with students and teachers were not handled appropriately by the school administration. 14 out of 121 responses recommended that an investigative reporting team should be established (see Actionable Change No. 7). For example, 8 out of 121 responses referenced one specific event where a Latin teacher was cited using "the n-word" in the classroom. Instead of the administration handling this situation appropriately, as one respondent explained, "the school left us without information or recognition that her actions were wrong and unclear on what those actions specifically were."

52 out of 231 students responded to the question "Did you ever witness racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher, peer, or adminstrator at FPS?" with accounts of racial insensitivity or discrimination by teachers. 17 of these accounts pertained to how teachers engaged in disciplinary actions with BIPOC students compared to White students, often describing situations where BIPOC students were reprimanded for behavior that White students engaged in without repercussion (such as "being loud"); respondents further noted that BIPOC students were treated differently and unfairly by faculty and peers, and disproportionately assigned In-School Suspension (ISS).

Extracurricular Opportunities
When asked "what extracurricular experiences should FPS offer to enhance learning about relevant social justice issues?," 37 out of 216 respondents suggested creating volunteer opportunities with organizations

that seek to end structural and **systemic racism**. Students also mentioned the idea of incorporating field trips that focus on **BIPOC** sites and creating a day for culture. 19 out of 216 respondents suggested field trips to historically Black locations, and 30 out of 216 suggested a "culture" day, an immersive experience for all students featuring BIPOC speakers. 15 out of 216 respondents recommended smaller groups where people could talk about their experiences with racism and other forms of discrimination so that their peers could learn from their experiences. 31 out of 216 respondents recommended the formation of a Black student association, 21 out of 216 suggested there be protest/civic engagement opportunities, and 24 out of 216 suggested the formation of a social justice club.

Positive Moments Relating to Race
When responding to "did you have any positive moments during your time at FPS relating to race, ethnicity, diversity, class, etc.?" 21 out of 38 students responded that they did experience positive moments within the classroom, specifically in AP US History and/or AP English courses. Conversely, 6 respondents described what they saw as disparities between AP and non-AP curriculum in the quality of instruction surrounding race. These sentiments were echoed in the responses to the question "Which, if any, of your classes at FPS explored anti-racist ideas (e.g. White privilege, social and economic justice, etc.)?," 24 out of 94 respondents specifically mentioned AP English and History courses. These statistics both highlight the positive impact that anti-racist curriculum can have on students, and also draw attention to the dearth of similar opportunities outside of advanced English and History classrooms since no students reported being exposed to anti-racist ideas outside of humanities classrooms.

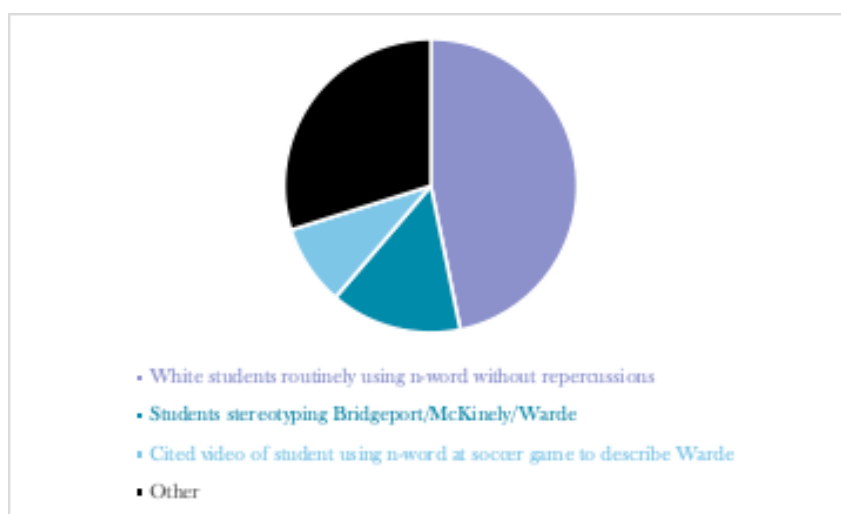*Racism from Peers, Faculty, and Administrators*
In 231 responses from students to the question "did you ever witness racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher, peer, or adminstrator at FPS?", accounts of witnessing racist remarks, slurs, microaggressions, and bullying were mentioned 124 times. Of that, 58 accounts specifically stated that White students within the FPS system routinely use the n-word with little to no repercussions. 68 out of 121 responses indicated that implementing mandatory presentations, courses, and training across all grade levels should be required. This data most directly shaped Actionable Change No. 3. See below for pie chart and data on instances of racial insensitivity in FPS (see next page):

Did you ever witness racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher, peer, or administrator at FPS?

There were 124 accounts of students witnessing racist remarks, slurs, microaggressions, and bullying. Within these accounts were three main themes.

Significant trends:

- "White students within the FPS system routinely use the n-word with little to no repercussions" – **58 mentions**

- "Students vocalizing stereotypes about Bridgeport, McKinley, and Warde" **– 18 mentions**

- "Video of a student using the n-word to describe Warde students at a soccer game" – **11 mentions**

- White students routinely using n-word without repercussions
- Students stereotyping Bridgeport/McKinely/Warde
- Cited video of student using n-word at soccer game to describe Warde
- Other

When asked if students had *experienced* racial insensitivity from a peer specifically, three main themes emerged: (1) students thinking it is okay to make racist remarks if they call it a "joke," (2) stereotyping students of other races and ethnicities, and (3) bullying students through racial slurs and gestures.

Instances of Racist Remarks Justified as "Jokes"
One of the most prevalent types of responses to our first student survey described incidents where respondents' classmates justified their racist remarks as "jokes." For example, respondents often noted other students' carefree use of the n-word in casual conversation, while singing a song, chanting at a sporting event, or reading out loud in class. Students who are Jewish noted they are often called "Jew" by their peers and hear antisemitic "jokes" about the Holocaust.

Instances of Racist Stereotypying
Respondents continually cited examples of peers using racial slurs and stereotypes, calling students by the incorrect race, telling BIPOC students to leave the country. Black students noted frequent instances of harmful racist stereotyping, like comments from their White peers that they act "too White," should be the best at sports, or should be subject experts on slavery, simply because of their race.

There were many more horrific accounts of racist stereotyping collected, but for the sake of the privacy of our respondents, we have chosen to omit these stories.

Witnessing Racism from a Peer, Teacher, or Administrator
When asked if students had *witnessed* racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher, peer, or administrator at FPS, many respondents indicated frequent instances of racial insensitivity from teachers. Several types of remarks were repeated by different respondents. 39 out of 121 responses requested that mandatory **anti-racism**, **implicit bias**, and **restorative justice** training should be required for faculty and staff on an ongoing basis. This data most directly shaped Actionable Change No. 2.

Out of the 231 responses to the question "did you ever witness racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher, peer, or adminstrator at FPS?," 52 accounts described racial insensitivity or discrimination by teachers. 5 of these pertained to tokenism in the classroom, 11 for discriminatory remarks, and 16 for perpetuating stereotypes. Some examples of discrimination by teachers that students witnessed were: teachers mixing up the names of their BIPOC students (3), making comments about Black students' hair (2), and singleing out Black students in the classroom (6) and vocalizing stereotypes about the city of Bridgeport (2).

When asked if students had experienced racial insensitivity from a teacher specifically, eight main themes emerged: teachers (i) singling students out for their race or ethnicity, (ii) stereotyping communities, (iii) expecting less and/or punishing students more based on race or ethnicity, (iv) expecting students to be representative of their entire race or ethnicity, (v) holding biases against students whose first languages were not English, (vi) ignoring racist or other bigoted comments in the classroom, (vii) confusing students of the same race or ethnicity with other students of that race or ethnicity, and (viii) using the n-word when reading literature out loud.

Singling Students out for their Race
Incidents include: teachers referring to BIPOC students as "exotic" and asking them "where are you from" or "why don't you speak the language of 'your people.'" One teacher called one respondent "ching chong" while another student was called "spicy" for correcting the pronunciation of their last name.

Stereotyping Communities
Incidents include: One teacher consistently said Mexicans mostly work in construction, 7-Eleven, and live together in cramped houses in Bridgeport. A student of Asian descent had a teacher who consistently made negative pointed comments about Asian countries and then would make a joke relating it to said

student, or look at them while they said it, or apologize to them in front of the class after they said it (apologize as in "but I know not all Chinese people are like that").

Lower Expectations and Harsher Punishments due to a Student's Race
Incidents include: a guidance counselor discouraging a BIPOC student from applying to more competitive schools despite being in the top 20% of their class; a White student being paired with a Black student because the teacher deemed the Black student "disruptive" and "difficult" and the White student could "handle [them]." In addition, numerous instances of teachers giving Black students harsher punishments than White students for the exact same behavior were submitted.

Teachers Asking Students to Speak for their Entire Race
Incidents include: various teachers looking only to Black students for answers whenever the conversation of race came up (often putting them on the spot), and asking Jewish students to educate their peers on the Holocaust.

Biases towards Non-Native English Speakers
Incidents include: a teacher looking at a student horrified when the teacher heard them speaking another language other than English, and parents being told by teachers that their children would not be able to excel from an educational standpoint because they spoke a different language at home despite neither of them having difficulties in school.

Ignoring Racist Remarks
Incidents include: a parent-principal/teacher meeting where the parents disclosed the children were being bullied for their race and the principal/teacher denying any racism in the school, teachers talking over BIPOC students opinions on racial issues, and various teachers pretending they did not notice a racist comment.

Confusing Students of the Same Race
Incidents include: a student being told by a teacher that they look similar to the other Asian students which is why they consistently confused them for one another among various other similar submissions.

Utterances of the N-Word from Literature
Examples of teachers using the n-word when reading literature out loud were reported numerous times and many students commented on the fact that the teacher was White and the connotation and meaning of the n-word was never discussed and was often used nonchalantly.

In 231 responses from students to the question "did you ever witness racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher, peer, or adminstrator at FPS?", accounts of witnessing racist remarks, slurs, microaggressions, and bullying were mentioned 124 times. Of that, 58 accounts specifically stated that White students within the FPS system routinely use "the n-word" with little to no repercussions. Many responses indicated witnessing students vocalizing stereotypes about Bridgeport, McKinley, and Warde (18). 11 respondents mentioned a situation where there was a video of a student using the n-word to

describe Warde students at a soccer game. Many responses indicated a frustration with the lack of consequences for students that engaged in this type of racist behavior.
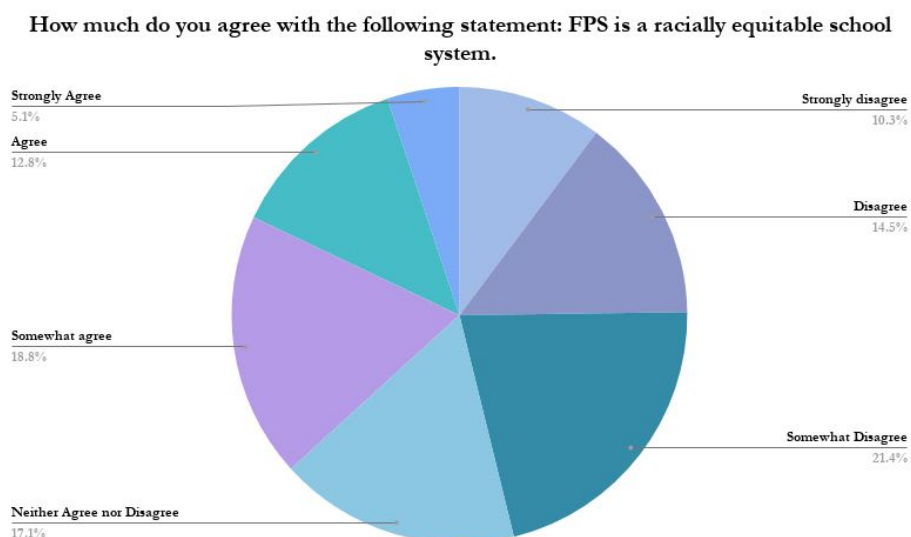
Teacher Survey Results

In addition to direct teacher and staff quotes at the beginning of each relevant Actionable Change, the below section summarizes the general trends and common responses to our second "Teacher and Staff Survey on Anti-Racism and Racial Equity in FPS".

(right) most of the respondents to the teacher and staff survey were veterans of the district, working at least ten years in FPS. (below) the responses to the teaching grade level question were somewhat evenly distributed.

How many years have you worked within FPS?
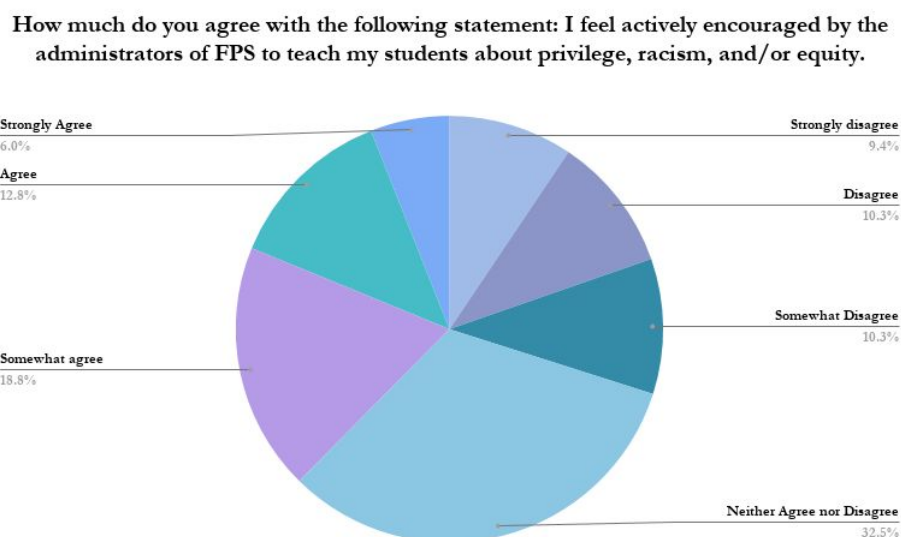

What Grade Level Do You Teach?
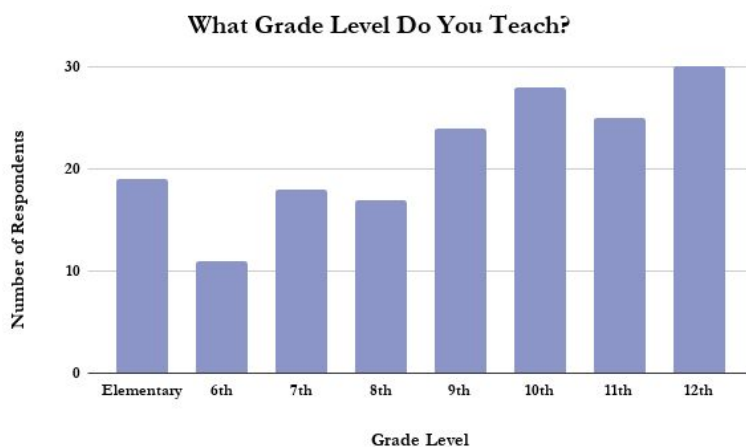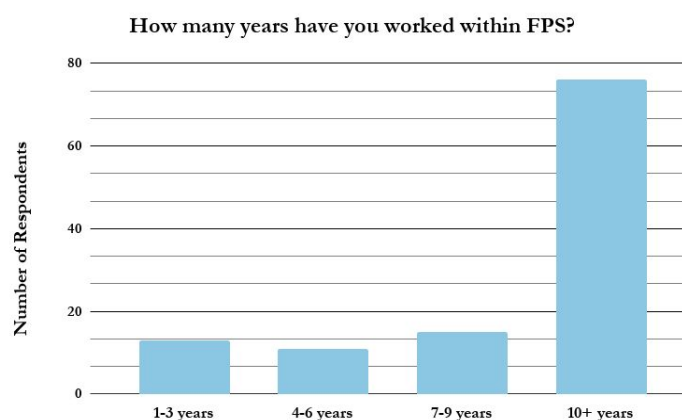
On Current Implementation of Anti-Racism Principles

When asked if their classrooms or interactions with students explored anti-racist ideas, of the 58 responses from teachers/staff who responded "yes," 16 cited the use of books in reading or English classes, 10 mentioned History or Social Studies classes, and 6 mentioned STEM courses, specifically Statistics, Biology and Environmental Science. 6 responses mentioned a discussion of criticism for how credit has been wrongfully withheld from BIPOC accomplishments or criticism of how BIPOC figures were portrayed throughout history. 10 responses discussed highlighting diverse voices and storytelling in the classroom, and 10 responses mentioned themes of privilege, bias, identity work, and stereotypes. 4 respondents mentioned trying to implement anti-racist ideas on an individual level with students.

How much do you agree with the following statement: FPS is a racially equitable school system.

Strongly Agree 5.1%
Agree 12.8%
Somewhat agree 18.8%
Neither Agree nor Disagree 17.1%
Strongly disagree 10.3%
Disagree 14.5%
Somewhat Disagree 21.4%

On the Desire for More Anti-Racism Training and Support

When asked what would be needed for teachers to shift towards a more anti-racist focus in FPS, 74.3% of respondents (87/117) replied that they would benefit from more support. 42 out of 117 respondents reported a lack of professional development and training. Responses emphasized a need for comprehensive and frequent training, in particular asking to hear from members of marginalized communities. 17 out of 117 respondents requested more resources, readings, and materials to inform anti-racist teaching.

How much do you agree with the following statement: I feel actively encouraged by the administrators of FPS to teach my students about privilege, racism, and/or equity.

Strongly Agree 6.0%
Agree 12.8%
Somewhat agree 18.8%
Strongly disagree 9.4%
Disagree 10.3%
Somewhat Disagree 10.3%
Neither Agree nor Disagree 32.5%

As the above graphic shows, nearly 30% of respondents disagreed to some extent with the notion that FPS administrators are actively supporting the promotion of anti-racism principles by staff. 20 out of 117

respondents called for increased support from leadership at the Central Office and BOE, asking for "explicit, codified language in mission statements" and BOE policy to "know that [the] whole building/district is on the same proverbial page, rather than feeling [their] practices might be rogue and undesirable." 14 out of 117 respondents mentioned a desire for more open conversation around this topic and the creation of a safe space to have these discussions. One respondent epitomized these sentiments by stating that it "needs to become part of class and community culture to be able to talk openly and discuss [anti-racism]." Other forms of support proposed by respondents include more time, altered, solidified, and enhanced curriculum, and increased diversity among staff.

On Anti-Racism Measures Outside of Curriculum Reforms
When asked if teachers felt that students were offered sufficient opportunities to explore race and cultural identity through field trips, guest speakers, assemblies, and related activities, few responses gave concrete examples of such opportunities. 29 out of 114 responses said they had not seen such opportunities, and 20 of 114 expressed that they were either unsure of such opportunities or felt that more could always be done. Of the respondents who said opportunities were available, there were 17 mentions of assemblies, 7 mentions of field trips, and 19 mentions of invited speakers. However, of these responses, few concrete examples were given, which included the Diversity Day/Week and International Day/Week activities that some schools had organized.

Respondents nearly unanimously agreed that building connections to neighboring school districts could lead to positive impacts for our communities. 36 responses specifically noted that developing collaborations with other schools and 30 explicitly noted that student exposure to more diversity would be beneficial. A few responses approached this topic with some hesitation, with the noted concerns being that in order to be effective, a program should have some longevity; additionally, it was pointed out that such connections need to be built in a way that is mutually beneficial and avoidant of White savior narratives.

On Current Disciplinary Policies
When asked about the effect disciplinary policies have on students and changes they would suggest to the current policy, 21% (24/117) of respondents explicitly mentioned "restorative justice or practices" in their response. 8% (9/117) of respondents expressed a desire for the implementation of disciplinary practices to be more consistent or have more clarity and guidance as it pertains to the plan. Of those, 5/7 respondents mentioned that some of the inconsistency in implementation stem from parental pressure - some respondents mentioned that privilege is at play here: "privileged parents have more time to call, more resources (i.e. lawyers) to bring to the argument, and stronger networks of influence."; "students with socioeconomic privilege, especially access to legal counsel and (amenable) doctors, suffer fewer consequences than those without such privilege."; "White parents have a lot of power in the school [to] complain and get their child's punishment decreased."

On Current Curriculum Approval Processes
When asked about their thoughts on the current methods of developing and approving curriculum in FPS, 50% of respondents (59/117) expressed that they are inadequate. 26 out of 117 respondents requested a more democratized approach, reporting that they want more teacher voices involved because curricular

changes are currently left to a small, disconnected group that promotes their own biases and preferences. 11 out of 117 respondents called for more incorporation of anti-racism and diverse perspectives into the process. 11 out of 117 respondents mentioned the inefficiency of curriculum change. Other respondents expressed a desire to seek outside perspectives and emulate research-based practices established elsewhere that have proven successful, as well as receive increased support from the district for implementation of new curriculum changes.

Common Misconceptions

While the majority of the responses to our teacher and staff survey were positive and expressed a strong desire for change, a significant minority of responses suggested fundamental misunderstandings of important topics like anti-racism, institutional racism, and implicit biases. Several respondents felt anti-racism was actually "reverse racism" and harmful to society and the school environment. Many respondents outright rejected the notion of racial biases or incomplete and misleading curriculum in education, with many further suggesting that current instruction and school practices are free of any problems relating to race. Similarly negative responses were present in our student surveys, but to a much less frequent extent.

While we appreciate these responses, we find that they further prove the need for district-wide trainings in anti-racism, restorative justice, and the many other areas detailed in later sections of this report. It is clear there are significant misconceptions concerning these important and necessary reforms. We look forward to addressing this issue specifically at the presentation of this report.

Conclusion

The data collected by FEC reveal a strong desire from FPS faculty, staff, students, and alumni to improve anti-racist teaching and racial equity within the district. Both students and staff shared disturbing stories of racist remarks directed at themselves or a peer. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of respondents in all three surveys wished for curricula across subjects to include racially diverse perspectives and more complete and accurate teachings on the subject of race, from institutional racism to racial identity. Taking the macro view, most of the respondents expressed a desire to see the education, treatment, and understanding of race improved within the district in the spirit of becoming more anti-racist. Importantly, the results from our surveys were foundational to this report; the Actionable Changes below came from these community perspectives and are reaffirmed with subsequent FEC data disbursed throughout this report.

Actionable Change No. 1 - Ensure curricula for all grade levels prioritizes cultural and racial diversity by amplifying representative perspectives and experiences of historically marginalized groups.

Student Perspectives
"I feel like these topics should be taught at an earlier age. I think starting as early as elementary school and 6th grade is important. I only remember learning about social justice themes in high

school." - Class of 2014 on the subjects taught during their time in FPS that felt inadequately or incorrectly covered, especially in regards to themes concerning racial equality, or marginalized groups.

"[diversity topics] were inadequately covered, they weren't covered at all!!!!! But native culture/studies were especially inadequately/incorrectly taught" - Class of 2016 on the subjects taught during their time in FPS that felt inadequately or incorrectly covered, especially in regards to themes concerning racial equality, or marginalized groups.

"We need to learn more about black history and stop cutting them out of what we learn" - Class of 2023

"I think the history we were taught, generally, was very watered down and whitewashed." - Class of 2016

"We read very few BIPOC authors in any subject. Our history classes were severely lacking in learning about anything other than from a White, privileged perspective"

"I felt my social studies classes did a good job of denouncing Christopher Columbus in high school. I also remember learning about slavery, Jim Crow, and Emmett Till early in my education." - Class of 2014

"MORE BIPOC TEACHERS, MORE LGBTQ+ TEACHERS, talk about Juneteenth, talk about indigenous peoples day, give lgbtq+ sex Ed. Why were all the deans and headmasters at my school white ?" - Class of 2016

"The way in which the government has played a role in supporting the skewed privileged system (ex. Redlining)" - Class of 2022 on suggestions that would be beneficial to integrate into their education in FPS.

"It is important to tell history correctly. Instead of merely mentioning injustices that white Americans have committed, we must examine these failures and focus on the perspectives of the marginalized." - Class of 2009

"We never talked about the land we live and learn on in Fairfield as being stolen land. We never talked about any of these indigenous tribes during school at all even though they contributed so much to our country." - Class of 2015

"I think we should learn slavery for how it was instead of making it seem like it was less of what happened" - Class of 2022

"AP classes with teachers that were willing to go outside of the curriculum" - Class of 2016 on the extent to which anti-racism is currently covered in FPS.

"I think in many cases we do not go in depth into how the past has bread present suffering" - Class of 2022 on the subjects taught during their time in FPS that felt inadequately or incorrectly covered, especially in regards to themes concerning racial equality, or marginalized groups

"Racial history in general- very textbook, unidimensional, and lacking" - Class of 2011 on the subjects taught during their time in FPS that felt inadequately or incorrectly covered, especially in regards to themes concerning racial equality, or marginalized groups.

"I feel like when we talk about racism it's always just the overview and they never teach us anything more then the overview of slavery" - Class of 2023

"In sophomore year history we explored the history of the Fairfield Connecticut emblem which is an illustration of a colonizer shaking hand [sic] with a Native American and says 1639. It was deemed inappropriate and we were asked to create a new emblem as a homework assignment. There was no exploration or lesson on why this emblem is racist and the fact that the land was stolen. Also years of MLK day being the one hour a year we talk about racial injustice for a White man's perspective. And years of glorifying Christopher Columbus on his (stupid) holiday." - Class of 2016

"I feel that history classes covered racial inequality as if it was a thing of the past. For example, we learned that slavery and the civil rights movement happened, but I don't remember discussing the current ongoing racial inequalities in America." - Class of 2014

"I think the English curriculum lacks diversity in both author representation and themes." - Class of 2021

"FPS" seems very "race neutral" insofar as we are all basically treated as "White" (either because we are, or if we are not, because those students have "assimilated" into a predominantly White context). There was never any recognition of racial difference within the classroom. I wish we would have had these discussions (e.g., analyzing the racial composition of Fairfield) instead of studying race as an abstract subject. I later attended an Ivy League school where the first thing we did was discuss Michelle Alexander's "The New Jim Crow." I had never had these conversations about race before and felt uncomfortable first broaching the subject. Even if just for educational purposes, FPS students should be having these race conversations earlier to prepare them for college/post-graduation endeavors." - Class of 2015

Faculty and Staff Perspectives

"As teacher of World Language, it is part of my responsibility to break down any barriers to cultural understanding and communication. Anti-racism promotes more cultural understanding, so yes, anti-racism is part of my responsibility as a teacher." - Ninth-Twelfth Grade teacher.

"I am a physical education teacher so it is not as naturally in our curriculum as it is and other subject areas. But there are definitely ways to do it." - Sixth-Eigth Grade teacher on incorporating and promoting anti-racist principles within their specific role.

"Inclusion of the accomplishments of black americans." - Seventh Grade teacher on what they want to see changed within the FPS curriculum, specifically regarding anti-racism and anti-Blackness.

"Difficult in subject area (math) to find opportunities to discuss anti-racist principles. I know it is not impossible, but has proven to be challenging." - Middle School teacher on the instruction in their role in FPS and the exploration of anti-racist ideas.

"I First think we all need to understand anti-Blackness. What does it mean? How does it impact students? How has our history been written through a white lens that completely removes black perspective and ugly policies and practices towards black Americans? I want to see a more honest approach to the history we teach students. I want to see us actively acknowledge the contributions of diverse scientists, engineers, and policy makers. I do not know what curriculum looks like in the middle and high school but there are probably changes that could be made." - Elementary School teacher on what they want to see changed within the FPS curriculum, specifically regarding anti-racism and anti-Blackness.

"Training is not the issue. Time within the curriculum is. Although one can fit material outside the core curriculum in with cleverness and effort, it is hard as the current curriculum does not even fit

well in a year. The forces on our curriculum err so far on the side of requiring as much as possible in a year that teachers are forced to take a poor, expedient approach to just getting the required material across let alone having time to enhance the curriculum." - High School teacher.

"In teaching math one can spend some time discussing how math, statistics in particular, can be used badly to support racist conclusions." - High School teacher on how anti-racism principles can be explored in STEM courses.

"In one class, for example, we explore the history of slavery and the experience of slaves through primary texts (such as the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass), as well as exploring white privilege, white construction of race, and racist attitudes and policies through literary texts (such as Huck Finn, and a number of contemporary essays about the n-word, minstrelsy, and the competing understandings of the novel as racist or anti-racist). We also routinely read short texts by writers such as James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, and Toni Morrison which raise awareness about race as supplements to other core texts that are not overtly about race, to help students make connections between racial inequality and oppression and the experience of exclusion, exploitation, and othering more broadly. I also feel that my own curricular choices are anti-racist. For example, I was handed a syllabus for a course new to me in which the core texts were written by 9 white Anglo writers and one African-American writer. I changed the syllabus so that it not includes not only the African American writer, but also a black Caribbean writer and a South American writer, and I made two additional core texts "book group options" in which the list students choose from includes Asian, Hispanic, African, Native American, and multiple African American options." - Eleventh and Twelfth Grade teacher.

Introduction

To create interactive learning environments that are conducive to mutual respect, belonging, and inclusive excellence is to prioritize efforts that inspire deeper interpersonal and intergroup understanding. This begins with the modeling and practice of social perspective taking — the process of perceiving, considering, and analyzing the perspectives of others (Kim et.al, 2018). This, of course, requires that students are exposed to an array of diverse perspectives throughout their educational experience and that they actively engage in dialogue geared towards understanding them. While there exist opportunities for teaching using diverse perspectives in present FPS curricula, lesson plans across subjects frequently lack explicit instructions to include marginalized narratives and perspectives, and thus topics are often taught from a predominantly White, Eurocentric perspective.

In order to move away from pedagogies and curricula that are more narrow in perspective, FEC calls for the **decolonization of curricula**. Though not necessarily with any conscious or malicious intention from faculty and administrators, for generations, the history taught and the research advanced in schools have not only reflected an **Orientalist perspective** originating from colonial powers, but one that has incompletely and sometimes incorrectly captured the experiences of Black, Latinx, Asian and Indigineous peoples. This process of decolonization requires that schools alter not only which stories are being taught, but by whom. Thus, FEC calls for FPS to not only incorporate but prioritize the stories of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (**BIPOC)**, as told from their own authors, in an attempt to expand the educational context for students and cultivate cultural knowledge.

Ultimately, FEC calls for a collaborative reimagining of the district's curriculum to ensure that FPS prioritizes cultural and racial diversity across all disciplines and grade levels. This is not to suggest that present curricula is of no value; there are many elements of the FPS curricula that offer students quality education. Nevertheless, curricula must be reimagined to incorporate anti-racism into its lessons, both in terms of the official curricular documents in the long term, and to decisions made by teachers in the short term. We want to re-emphasize our appreciation for the difficult process of curriculum development, and the many teachers and staff who are already working diligently to incorporate anti-racism principles into their instruction. We hope this section will help advance the on-going process of curriculum reform through the lens of anti-racism and decolonization.

This Actionable Change begins by providing research as to why decolonizing curriculum and promoting anti-racism in the classroom is important, followed by an implementation section which outlines the strengths and weaknesses of current FPS curricula as a whole, broken down by subject area (from analysis of curriculum documents made public online). After each subject analysis, we provide listed sub-recommendations that describe tangible ways to promote anti-racism and the decolonization of curriculum. This Actionable Change was intentionally structured so the reader can comprehend a "line-item" evaluation of the entire FPS curricula. Importantly, these recommendations can be immediately actualized in the short-term and later elaborated upon in long-term, expanse reform. Additionally, many of the recommended reforms are applicable across subject and grade level. Ultimately, though, the goal of decolonizing curricula and promoting anti-racism - regardless of grade level and subject - is to dispel harmful misconceptions or content inaccuracies that stem from a limited, homogenous Eurocentric viewpoint by incorporating a variety of perspectives from previously unappreciated people and groups. We must keep this principle in mind as we navigate this complicated process.
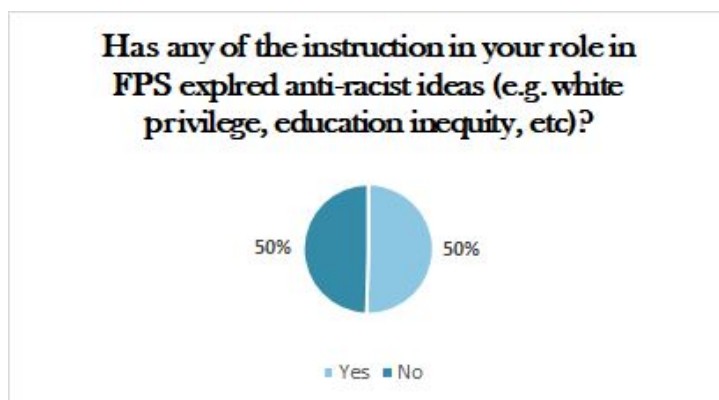
Research

One of the first concerns teachers and parents often have when talking about exposing and dismantling racism and racial oppression, is that the subject matter is too uncomfortable or inappropriate to teach, especially at young ages. However, as studies indicate, one's racial preference begins as young as 3 months, and by kindergarten, children begin to mentally associate with their racial group (The Children's Community School, 2018). Because racial conception begins so early, it is imperative that FPS acknowledges and dismantles damaging biases as early as possible.

When should FPS introduce anti-racism teachings?

High school education — 16%

84%
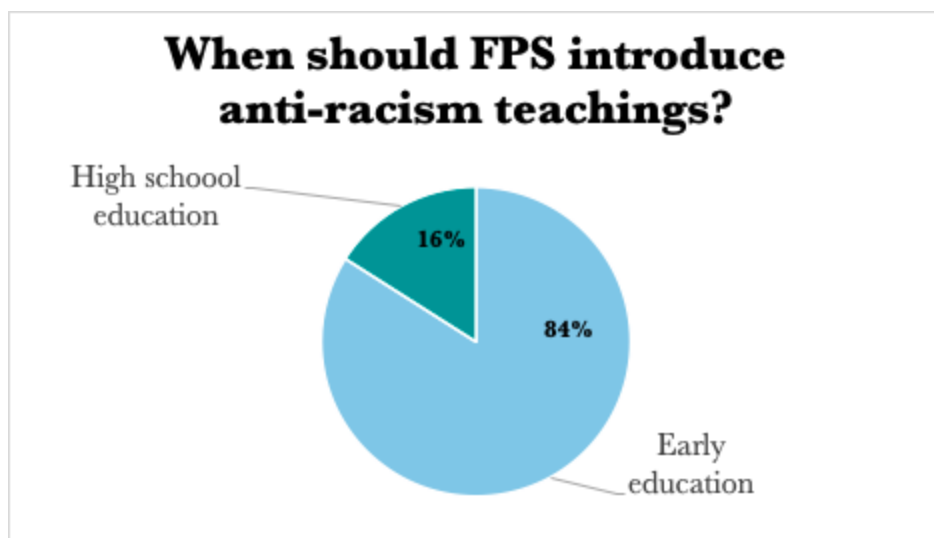
Early education

84% of respondents to our first student survey felt anti-racism teachings should be incorporated into early FPS education, aligning with the consensus in academia that these concepts are most effective when incorporated into the education of young children.

First and foremost, it is critical that FPS re-examines *what* is being taught to FPS students. FPS curricula are often significantly **whitewashed**, focusing heavily on White plight and success while minimizing the damage inflicted on others to achieve said success. These omissions imply to BIPOC students that their culture's history is irrelevant, suggesting these perspectives are less important than those of their White counterparts (Ferroni, 2012). This incomplete perspective further ignores the present racial inequities that persist in most facets of life, diminishing the need to rectify these problems (Houchin, 2017). These structures are what continue to feed the beast of racism, allowing it to exist on all levels throughout our community and country at large.

Has any of the instruction in your role in FPS explred anti-racist ideas (e.g. white privilege, education inequity, etc)?

50%   50%

■ Yes ■ No

Secondly, FPS must also examine *how* these stories are being shared, and from whose perspective. Research supports that reading multicultural literature is essential for students to gain cultural understanding and awareness, develop cross-cultural friendships, sharpen critical thinking, and encourage identity formation (Grasso, 2016). While some FPS high school courses take a more expansive approach to understanding the history of underrepresented groups than others, even the most expansive courses currently offered lack the inclusivity needed to fully decolonize curricula. To reach that goal, it is necessary that curricula not only include marginalized narratives, but ensure they are being told by those who experience it, further amplifying BIPOC voices and centering their perspectives within and throughout history and Social Studies courses, specifically.

Not only does FPS need to include more diverse authors, but it must also critically examine the role of certain harmful White-authored texts in curricula. For example, books like *To Kill A Mockingbird* or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which are about the Black experience as told by White authors, are often criticized for perpetuating deeply damaging **White savior** narratives and misrepresenting Black experiences ([Freedom Literature, 2018](#)). FPS should consider either removing these texts, or keeping them as examples to be critically analyzed for both their good and bad elements.

Limitations to a Diversity Graduation Requirement

Given the following list of proposed comprehensive changes at every grade level and in every subject, it may be tempting to develop a catch-all diversity class or graduation requirement in which to incorporate our recommendations instead of amending all other existing classes. Such a requirement, wherein students must take a course(s) to learn how to appreciate and respect different groups of people, is often cited as a practical educational reform to promote acceptance of different identities. While this measure is well-intentioned, such a reform is too narrowly focused. The larger objective outlined in this Actionable Change -- to incorporate anti-racist teachings and diverse perspectives throughout FPS curricula across all subjects and grade levels -- inherently requires students to engage thoughtfully with a myriad of perspectives outside the privileged, incomplete, and sometimes problematic Eurocentric framework. Moreover, as the [Note on Intersectionality](#) describes, racial identity and racial oppression cannot be studied in a vacuum; they affect every system and subject studied. Furthermore, as we hope to discuss in future reports, curriculum surrounding the LGBTQIA+ community and religious practices are two subject areas of many that deserve similar attention to rectify **false narratives** and diversify perspectives. No single diversity class can provide sufficient appreciation or understanding of the countless ways identities and cultures interact. If a student's transcript, however, reflects coursework complete with diverse and truthful perspectives, a diversity requirement is rendered superfluous. FEC hopes to continue working with FPS and the BOE so that true diversity across many characteristics can be realized in every subject and not simply in one theoretical graduation requirement.

Implementation

The Desired Changes to Curriculum According to FPS Students

In our first student survey, when asked "Which, if any, subject areas do you believe were inadequately covered during your time within FPS?," respondents provided a long and varied list of topics.

The most common theme mentioned was the ongoing oppression of Black Americans and other **marginalized groups** into the modern day, ranging from **mass incarceration** to **environmental racism**.

This was closely followed by better coverage of world history and current events in countries outside of the U.S. and Europe. When discussing these groups, many emphasized a desire to talk about their histories and cultures *outside* of the narrative of oppression (pre/post slavery, pre/post colonization, pre/post genocide, etc.) in favor of positive cultural elements. Other grievances included a deeper and more honest examination of colonialism and capitalism and their influence on exploitative global suffering.

In line with giving a more well-rounded view of these oppressed groups, many also mentioned a desire for the curriculum to more deeply explore and emphasize the contributions of prominent Black historical figures to American literature, culture, and science, alongside the success and subsequent destruction of the Black community on Black Wall Street in Tulsa and Rosewood.

The next most common grievance expressed was a desire for curriculum to explicitly address and explain the history and modern prevalence of race, racism, bias and privilege, on both an interpersonal and institutional levels, emphasizing a need for the conversations to start young and include more than 'KKK hoods and lynchings'.

Finally, many respondents were concerned not only with what they were taught, but with how it was being taught. Many called for an increased diversity in perspectives in the literature, textbooks, sheet music, and other sources used to teach various subjects, with a focus on amplifying voices of marginalized groups. Others emphasized a need for diversity and **anti-racism** to be extended to subjects besides history and english, and for an **intersectional** approach to be taken.

The student and teacher quotes listed at the beginning of this Actionable Change mirror the aforementioned sentiments of respondents to our first student survey; namely, many wished to see more complete, accurate historical narratives that comprehensively explore all forms of racism in the past and present, while acknowledging the accomplishments and positive historical narratives of these marginalized groups, all told directly from the perspectives of those studied.

The remainder of this Actionable Change analizes current FPS curricula by subject and grade level and provides recommendations for promoting anti-racism and the decolonization of curriculum.

Social Studies

Analysis of Current K-12 Curricula
Elementary School
Examination of curriculum documents for Grades K-5 Social Studies classes in FPS reveals opportunities for expanding racial inclusivity. Questions included in the K-2 curricula used to guide instruction explore differences between families of students within the classroom, differences between communities and how "people and groups with different views" shape a community (FPS, 2016; FPS, 2016; FPS, 2016). More explicitly, the curricula for Grades 3-4 explore the role Indigenous peoples have played in Connecticut's past and present, but neglect to address any other races. The curriculum does not necessitate exploration of racially diverse perspectives throughout history or deviation from teaching exclusively White perspectives on marginalized groups (FPS, 2016; FPS, 2016). Like the K-2 curriculums, these do not provide teachers with the proper guidance and resources to prioritize racial and cultural diversity in their instruction.

The "Freedom and Equality" section of the Grade 5 curriculum outlines the study of Indigenous peoples' role in United States history prior to colonization through the American Revolution; however, discussion

of Indigenous people is entirely centered around their contributions to White people (e.g. "Explore why the interactions with the native peoples of New England were important to the survival of the Plymouth Colony"). It also fails to mention African Americans or their enslavement. The only opportunities for discussion of slavery within the curriculum present themselves in the phrase "various groups." This occurs frequently within the curriculum document, but these "various groups" are defined in the overview and do not explicitly include Black Americans (FPS, 2016). Furthermore, neither the oppression of Indigenous peoples nor African Americans is explicitly studied in their present day contexts.

Middle School
Within the middle school Social Studies curricula, the World Regional Studies I and II courses for Grade 6 and 7 are relatively effective in building the foundations for global awareness and understanding of non-European civilizations with the focus on culture, history, and contemporary issues (FPS, 2016; FPS, 2016). However, the opportunity to understand non-European civilization does not guarantee a decolonized curriculum. Although there are units dedicated to the Middle East, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, East Asia, and South America, there is no requirement to place the emphasis on representative perspectives from each of these regions. Because of this, as is reflected in our student responses, the focus typically remains on the White perspective.

The Grade 8 Social Studies course titled "America and the American Dream" is the first overview of United States history that FPS students receive which covers a variety of perspectives, and while "The Struggle for Freedom, Equality, and Social Justice" is a primary theme of the course, there are ample opportunities to diversify perspectives. The experiences and perspectives of historically underrepresented communities are not prioritized, or even acknowledged during certain units of study, and there is no articulated effort to correct false narratives surrounding the Civil War and Reconstruction (FPS, 2016).

High School
When reviewing the curriculum for high school Civics courses, it is apparent that many of these classes do not adequately address issues surrounding race in America. In the course Civics Youth and the Law, there is no mention of the **systemic racism** pervading the U.S. criminal justice system, from policing to post-prison consequences (The Sentencing Project, 2018). Simply put, the objective to explore civil rights is not truly fulfilled, as it does not include the ways in which certain civil rights are denied to members of society today (FPS, Youth and the Law, 2016). Other courses, such as Contemporary U.S. History, have sections devoted to the struggle for freedom, equality, and social justice, but do not address issues faced by marginalized peoples outside of this unit (FPS, 2016). This course also fails to acknowledge U.S. imperialism. Even at the most rigorous level, with courses like AP Modern European History, there are notable content gaps. In the course description it claims an emphasis on the "interaction of Europe and the world" as one of the themes of the course, but ultimately ends up centering on Europe at the expense of this goal. (FPS, AP MEH, 2016).

Recommendations for Improvement of K-12 Curricula

In the context of Social Studies, promoting anti-racism and the decolonization of curricula requires the implementation of a variety of racially diverse perspectives to complement the predominant Eurocentric

and White perspective that currently occupies many lesson plans. A generalizable rule of promoting racial diversity and the decolonization of curricula is to teach a topic from the perspective of those studied; in other words, lessons on historical or present day racism should not exclusively be supported by White authors or sources. Teach a variety of perspectives, *from* those perspectives. Additionally, anti-racism in and decolonization of Social Studies requires false or incomplete narratives to be corrected or expanded upon to fully and accurately teach a subject. Below are our specific recommendations for improving Social Studies curricula.

Create conversations around fairness and the racism experienced by BIPOC people. Given how early children form racial biases, it is necessary that teachers begin to make space in the classroom for conversations surrounding race and culture from the outset. For instance, Kindergarten teachers can introduce The Teaching Tolerance lesson plan "What's Fair?" which helps students understand fairness and how to treat people equally and with respect. Grade 3 teachers should consider expanding the objective "investigate historical Connecticut residents and their impact on Connecticut and national history" to include Connecticut residents of different racial/cultural backgrounds and their impact (FPS, 2016). As for Grade 5, teachers should add a focus on how colonization affected Indigenous peoples, from their perspective, up to the present day, as well as their history and culture separate from colonization and oppression. Here are some appropriate books to broach these subjects. Teachers should incorporate the history of slavery and African Americans in the United States as explicitly as possible, seeing as the current curriculum does not include these topics. For example, when asking "How did the 13 colonies affect the perspectives, and change the freedom and opportunities for various groups?," teachers can be intentional about interpreting 'various groups' to mean Indigenous people, women, and enslaved people, among others (FPS, 2016). Social studies curricula must also trace the causal link between America's racist past and present day racial disparities and inequity; even if it is in simpler terms. Explaining that differential treatment towards these groups still exists today in familiar institutions is imperative.

Alter curriculum to explicitly teach about racism, anti-racism, and marginalized peoples' histories, from their perspectives. Racism and racial oppression do not solely exist during certain periods of history; these realities are entrenched in every structure, unit of study, and historical period studied in the classroom. Thus, it is imperative that students are taught the meaning of racism and how it has manifested throughout American history through the present day. Curricula, furthermore, should be altered to include discussions of marginalized groups, such as Indigenous peoples and Black Americans, and the present structures that perpetuate racial inequity. Finally, in learning about the history of racism and discrimination in the United States, students should feel empowered to create personal and collective anti-racism action plans.

As students pursue a more in-depth study of history in their coursework, a lesson similar to Teaching Tolerance's What Counts as History? should be included by teachers. Aside from challenging students to expand their ideas about what 'counts' as history, this resource encourages students to specifically engage with content on the experiences of excluded groups. This will serve as a helpful guide for all History courses, but has specific applications in Grade 11 U.S. History, Civics Youth and the Law and AP Modern European and U.S. history.

Change curriculum to correct false narratives and add new electives. As with all other grade levels, decolonization of the current course curricula requires the inclusion and amplification of voices of historically underrepresented and marginalized groups in all units of study to avoid predominantly White narratives. This requires the mandatory inclusion of sources from BIPOC historians, authors, and academics. There are a number of false or incomplete narratives, as highlighted in our student data, that remain unaddressed. These include, but are not limited to, the narrative surrounding Christopher Columbus, U.S. imperialism, Civil Rights Movement leaders (MLK, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Black Panthers etc.), and racism after the Emancipation Proclamation. Second to this, FEC recommends that FPS append a wider range of electives to their currenting offerings. For reference, Staples High School offers a wide range of elective courses including African Studies, East Asian Studies, Latin American Studies, and Middle East Studies (SHS Program of Studies, 2020).

We are excited by recent news that Connecticut will become the first state in the nation to require all high schools to offer classes in African-American, Black, Puerto Rican, and Latino studies. This effort is an excellent beginning to developing curricula that appropriately and accurately teaches these cultural perspectives and should be further expanded upon by FPS. This curricula development should exist in tandem with the implementation of important trainings for faculty and staff to ensure these concepts are taught respectfully and effectively (see Actionable Change No. 2).

English

Analysis of Current K-12 Curricula
Elementary School
The K-5 English curricula include no requirements regarding specific authors or texts to read with students, so there is no assurance that students will be exposed to literature from racially diverse perspectives. Currently, grades K-5 English curricula include objectives to promote understanding of topics, cultures, and people, but in the majority of curriculum documents, the words "culture" or "diverse" only appear in the Common Core emphases for each unit, where the same objectives to work with "diverse partners" or recount stories from different cultures reappear for each unit. The remaining curriculum documents fail to outline this objective specifically or provide teachers with the resources to meet these goals. Within the current curriculum documents for Grades 1-5 are lessons on "writing like a mentor author," reading nonfiction, participating in book clubs, reading historical fiction, and engaging in biography studies, all of which provide opportunities to read racially diverse literature (FPS, 2012; FPS, 2012; FPS, 2012; FPS, 2012; FPS, 2012). However, such opportunities do not guarantee a diversity in literature because the curriculum does not explicitly mandate the study of diverse authors or literature within these units. Because of this lack of specificity, teachers may not take these opportunities to discuss race, or they may fail to adequately explore the topic.

Middle School
The English curricula for Grades 6-8 provide students with a list of authors that will be read, most of whom are White authors (FPS, 2014; FPS, 2014; FPS, 2014). The lack of multicultural and mutliracial literature in the existing 6-8 English curriculums impedes students' ability to learn **cultural competence**

and reduce racial biases. And again, curricula lack explicit emphasis on exploring both BIPOC struggles and triumphs.

High School

As is the case in elementary and middle school, the lists of authors provided for Grades 9-10 English curricula are not racially diverse, with only one or two authors from each list who are not of European descent (FPS, 2014; FPS, 2014). The only explicit opportunity for discussions on race in the Grade 9 English curriculum presents itself in a unit titled "Reading the World – Social Issues: How do characters respond to their environment?" during which students "identify issues of power within a text" (FPS, 2014). The curricula for Grades 10-12 English include themes of racial and cultural diversity, as seen in the

Did your high school English department present a wide enough array of voices and authors?

Blank 9.5%

Yes 35.2%

No 55.2%

Grade 10 unit "What Constitutes Humanity?" which calls for reading texts of non-Western origin. Similarly, Grade 11 units include topics like American identity, the American Dream, and American conflicts, providing opportunities for conversations about race. While these units provide a point of departure for conversations surrounding race and ethnicity in America, there need to be explicit instructions to discuss these issues, reinforced with supplementing resources about how to do so appropriately for teachers and students alike (see Actionable Change No. 2).
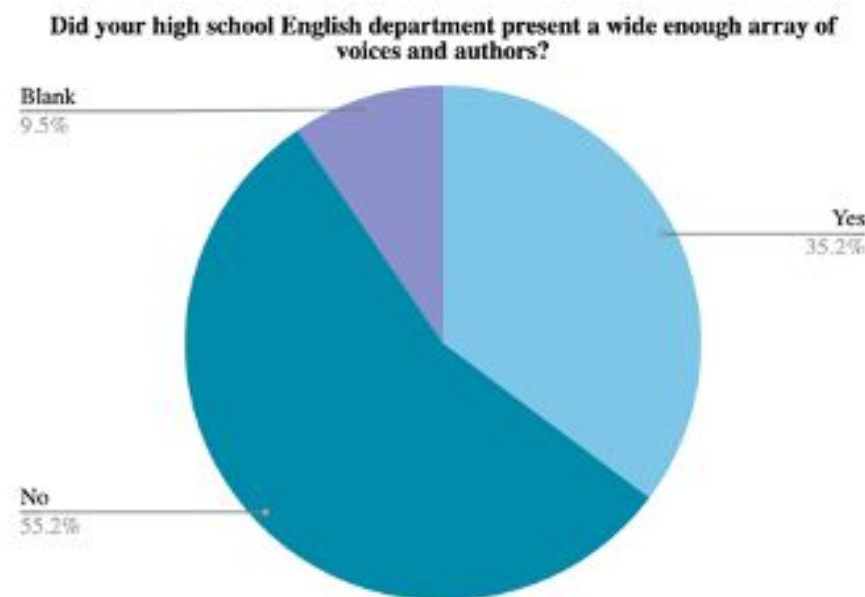
Recommendations for Improvement of K-12 Curricula

Similarly to Social Studies, promoting anti-racism and the decolonization of curricula in English courses requires the implementation of a variety of racially diverse perspectives to complement the predominant Eurocentric and White perspective that currently occupies many lesson plans. Once again, a topic should be taught from the perspective of those studied. Furthermore, English courses have the opportunity to expand the number and type of narrative themes to include cultures, histories, and perspectives ignored by the present curricula. Below are our specific recommendations for improving K-12 English curricula.

Include books that talk about racial identity and racial prejudice. Racial identity in literature is a concept that, when introduced to students at a young age, can help develop an awareness and positive understanding of race and diversity. Beginning in Kindergarten, teachers should incorporate topics of race

and culture into the existing curriculum by reading and discussing books that introduce the ideas of race and racial prejudice. *Let's Talk About Race* by Julius Lester is a picture book that is an appropriate way to introduce these topics to young students. Grade 1 teachers can promote conversations and awareness about race in the nonfiction/how-to unit by ensuring that children not only learn about the cultures of their peers, but an array of different cultures. A lesson like Looking at Race and Racial Identity in Children's Books, outlined by Teaching Tolerance, helps students form text-to-self, -other and -text connections in their literary development. As for Grades 4 and 5, teachers can foster peer discussions about race in the biographies unit by selecting works by authors from historically marginalized groups that emphasize topics of racial diversity, history, and equality. Through My Eyes, an autobiography by Ruby Bridges, and Who Was Frederick Douglass? by April Jones Prince, are excellent examples. These principles and strategies extend beyond the elementary level into the highest levels of coursework by reading works from authors including Kimberlé Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, among others (MCVSD, 2020).

Alter curriculum to explicitly include and amplify racially diverse authors. The elementary school English curricula should be amended to prioritize discussions of diversity and center voices from marginalized groups in all grades and across all units of study. In particular, units such as "Reading Nonfiction, Writing Nonfiction" in Grade 1 (FPS, 2012), "Reading and Talking About Books in Clubs" and "Reading Biographies" in Grade 4 (FPS 2012), and "Reading Historical Fiction" in Grade 5 (FPS, 2012) should place particular emphasis on amplifying the voices of racially diverse authors. Additionally, curriculum should provide explicit examples of texts which highlight BIPOC experiences in their entirety, from suffering to success.

English teachers can expose students to other voices on race by encouraging them to read books by diverse authors, texts by teens, and stories from their own peers, all while discussing them in class.

Two lists that teachers can use to recommend/require books to their classrooms are The New York Times' Antiracist Reading List and the Anti-Racist Reading List from Dr. Ibram X. Kendi.

STEM

A significant oversight of the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) curricula in general is the assumption that these fields are neutral and objective, and therefore exempt from conversations of racial justice. Science, in truth, is conducted by humans who hold their own prejudices and implicit biases. It is impossible for science and other STEM classrooms to be truly neutral when instruction occurs within the oppressive historical and political landscapes of the local and national community (Russ, 2017). Ignoring racism and anti-Blackness in the history of STEM does FPS students a great disservice. If the assumption that STEM is neutral and objective is accepted, knowing that BIPOC people are excluded in these fields, then it follows that their exclusion can be deemed natural and rational. Moreover, units in STEM courses have a responsibility to explore the ways in which our understanding of STEM's "objectivity" has been manipulated to oppress Black people and other communities of color in the United States.

To address the humans and institutions, including their systemic and implicit biases, behind the STEM concepts students learn, curricula must include lessons on the people behind these discoveries. Throughout FPS's K-12 STEM education, though technical concepts of each subject are thoroughly investigated and applied, lessons about the racially diverse thinkers behind these subjects are a rarity in the current curricula.

Analysis of Current K-12 Curricula
Elementary School
Beyond the material found in STEM courses, students formulate perceptions around what types of people belong in these fields at a very young age. Studies have found that by the second grade, the stereotype of a scientist as a White man has already begun to materialize (Chambers, 1983). Developing STEM curricula so that young BIPOC students see their identities as a part of these subjects reaffirms their rightful place studying these concepts. Learning about the thinkers and influences behind STEM subjects humanizes these fields and reveals the influence of BIPOC scientists, mathematicians, and thinkers who contributed to these subjects. Kindergartners, for example, begin their Math courses learning and counting numerals without understanding how this system was formed in part by ancient Sumerians (FPS Mathematics, 2020; The Story of Mathematics). Elementary STEM education needs to promote the BIPOC thinkers that helped create these academic fields, thereby showing students of all racial identities that they equally belong in these areas.

Middle School
Developing curricula to include the diverse array of people behind the STEM fields should be continued into middle school. Math 6 and 7 extensively investigate reasoning principles, but seemingly makes no mention of the influential mathematicians that developed these concepts (FPS, 2013). Research shows that developing a **science identity** for students is important in middle and high school classrooms (Vincent-Ruz, 2018), seeing as it is an important driver of students' choices during this developmental period. This identity is not only cultivated from an excellent technical training in the subject matter itself, but from exposure to people within the field that share an identity with the student. Both of these components must be met if all students are to succeed in STEM.

High School
Like many high school courses, students' exposure to STEM courses and resulting experiences heavily influences the types of academics or work they pursue after graduation. Studies have found that BIPOC students who leave high school with the intention of studying science in college often feel unsupported or discouraged upon arrival to those institutions (Johnson, 2007). BIPOC students must have their aptitude and identity affirmed in high school science classrooms to gain a salient sense of self and belonging that will allow them to succeed in higher education (Vincent-Ruz, 2018).

Recommendations for Improvement of K-12 Curricula

Promoting anti-racism and the decolonization of curricula in STEM requires teachers to develop lesson plans that incorporate identity into these fields. Because these areas of study have been and continue to be particularly exclusionary across factors like race, gender, and socioeconomic class, the content of a STEM

course's classwork must be accompanied by re-affirming lessons in identity through a variety of mechanisms. Below are our recommendations that, while applicable to many subject areas, are particularly important to implement in STEM given the unique racial inequities and obstacles in these classrooms.

Alter curriculum to explicitly acknowledge the contributions of BIPOC scientists to content taught in STEM classes. While it is important to integrate the voices of BIPOC scientists into the curriculum, it must go hand in hand with the acknowledgement of those whose voices were not acknowledged throughout history. Maintaining the centrality of White, male thinkers in STEM suggests BIPOC thinkers have nothing to contribute, an implication that is far from the reality. We cannot amplify modern BIPOC voices without acknowledging that they have been silenced for centuries, and have not been included in the discussion (Bourzac, 2019). It is important to have these conversations and to incorporate them with intention (Russ, 2017; Daane, 2017). To learn from modern, diverse voices in STEM, teachers may turn to Twitter, making it easier than ever to find and amplify modern scientists in the classroom. Hashtags such as #BlackInSTEM, #BlackInTheIvory and #ShutDownSTEM both amplify the voices of Black scientists and their science, while also acknowledging the many areas for improvement for achieving **equity** in science (ShutDownSTEM).

Highlight teachers' identities. STEM teachers should highlight the role that identity plays in STEM while also sharing aspects of their own identity. Described as "courageous transparency," this teaching strategy reveals the humanity behind the instructor and "relinquish[es] some element of power" giving it to the students (Tuitt 2016), (Knezz 2019). In one particular study of BIPOC women in science classrooms, a majority of participants expressed strong desires to get to know their instructors (Johnson 2007). Breaking down these barriers and allowing for humanity and identity to be a part of the classroom helps to form an equitable and inclusive learning community.

Tailor class structure to student demographics and needs. A simple gesture that can have a significant impact on a student's sense of belonging in the STEM classroom is matching the course syllabus, classroom behavior, and group dynamics within the classroom to the instructor's pedagogy (Subramaniam, 1999). Setting clear expectations and acknowledging a need for racial equity within the syllabus and initial instruction helps to create a safe and equitable learning community for students. Creating and administering pre-course surveys to gain information from students about what they are excited about, what they are nervous about, how they learn best, and how the instructor can best support their learning is helpful to achieve this end. This not only produces useful information for the instructor as they design the course, but also communicates to students that these aspects of their individual identities are valued in the classroom (Laudadio, 2019; Laudadio, 2017).

Rephrase and restructure opportunities for students to ask questions. It is proven that closing a lecture with "any questions?" is not an effective way of gauging classroom understanding and sparking discussion (Johnson, 2007). This strategy leaves many voices unheard while allowing for the overamplification of certain voices. BIPOC students are often less likely to speak up for fear of drawing attention to themselves, or feeling isolated in their confusion (Johnson, 2007). There are a number of equitable discussion strategies that could be easily incorporated into any classroom, including STEM

classrooms. These strategies acknowledge different learning styles, provide time for students to process what is salient and what is unclear, and can operate on individual, small group and large group levels. Additionally, frequent formative assessment is a great method for an instructor to gain information about how students are incorporating the classroom knowledge, and can be easily tied in with these discussions (i.e. collecting written discussion responses at the end of class (Dunnavant, 2017).

Include identity affirming activities in class. The strategies detailed above for acknowledging and validating the role that anti-Blackness has played in science throughout history at the elementary school level should be continued on to both the middle and high school levels. Within this established context, it is worthwhile to affirm the identities of students within the classroom as being compatible with the attributes that make a good scientist (Knezz, 2019). Intentional identity-affirming activities are recommended at all levels of K-12 education. As an assignment, students can be tasked with researching and presenting on diverse scientists. There are a multitude of online resources for finding and learning about diverse scientists throughout history (175 Faces of Science, African American Pioneers of Science). Inclusive lesson plans available online detail how to assign short research projects on diverse scientists to students, specifically asking to not only discuss their accomplishments, but also their personal experiences (Laudadio, 2017).

Include conversations about racial injustice in STEM across the relevant subject areas. It is imperative that in addition to studying theorems and principles, students learn not only about those who created them, but the systems of racial bias and oppression that allowed certain people to progress in these discoveries while preventing others from the same success. It is also imperative that students understand how science and pseudoscience have been weaponized against marginalized communities. Find examples and information about these historical injustices in Appendix II.

Music and Art
The music and art classrooms are ideal environments to teach lessons through the lens of anti-racism. These environments connect children with other members of their culture in shared expression (Multicultural Music Education, 2010). Furthermore, exposure to different forms of music and art allows students of one background to understand students of another (Multicultural Music Education, 2010). The opportunity to develop a respect for and interest in difference through these subjects should not be understated. Anti-racist lessons in these areas decolonize perceptions of Whiteness and Euro-centric music and art as the pinnacle of their fields, contextualizing these perspectives in a larger global perspective that values difference equally without assigning hierarchical value.

Analysis of Current K-12 Curricula
In FPS, specifically, the elementary music curriculum makes explicit mention of "perform[ing] multicultural music and dances" and relat[ing] artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding." (FPS, 2018). Culturally contextualizing different forms of music and their composers, in fact, is emphasized throughout the objectives in grades K-12. Similarly, in the elementary art curriculum, different cultural perspectives are appreciated, from Mexican and Indigenous works and materials (FPS, 2012). A cursory review of these curriculum documents reveals

important objectives and broad references of different cultures, the inclusion of which is essential for developing an anti-racist lens in these subjects.

While these objectives in the music and art curriculums are clear, little to no resources or specific examples are provided to meet these goals. This ambiguity leaves the responsibility of finding, learning, and teaching diverse perspectives in music to the teachers, each of whom will have varying time and resources to do so. Consequently, a student's exposure to different musical and artistic perspectives will depend on their assigned teacher. Providing concrete resources and examples in the curricula itself will remedy this problem by guaranteeing every child will learn diverse perspectives in these classes.

Recommendations for Improvement of K-12 Curricula
<u>Music</u>
Diversify composers and genres studied and performed. Although FPS is majority-White, many middle and high school students form ideas around Black culture most regularly through the consumption of music, a result of living in a technology-forward world. Scholar Tricia Rose asserts that "It is conceivable now to be a White fan of hip hop who knows a great deal about Black hip hop artists and tales of ghetto life but who has little or no contact with Black people and knows very little about Black life and history" ([Rose, 2008](#)). Many White students fail to understand why they portray themselves or a message a certain way due to the lack of education they hold surrounding Black life and history. This is why an integrative approach to anti-racism education is necessary in FPS. Students need to understand their history in order to understand their present and future in every part of their evolving world view. An excellent resource to diversify music programs K-12 is the [Institute for Composer Diversity](#) at the State University of New York at Fredonia. Their [Composer Diversity Database](#) allows "allows users to discover over 4,000 composers of historically underrepresented genders, racial, ethnic, and cultural heritages, and sexual orientations". Additionally, their [Works Diversity Database](#) "allows users to search for individual compositions with numerous search filters from among over 1,600 art songs by women as well as over 2,400 works for large and small wind ensembles and over 11,000 orchestral works by underrepresented composers.

<u>Art</u>
Move towards culturally responsive art education. Art curriculum is naturally a varied and unrestrained area of education; therefore, providing concrete examples is somewhat counterintuitive. However, much research has been published describing the guiding principles by which instructors and administrators should tailor culturally-competent and anti-racist art cirriculums. It is important that art teachers develop a curriculum through a socio-anthropological lens, meaning that special emphasis is put on understanding the knowledge of artists and their sociocultural context at the time when their work was produced. This will also allow teachers to start conversations wherein they actively recognize the cultural and social biases held by both students and themselves. Understanding one's own limitations and biases in teaching cultural lessons is crucial to the appropriate and respectful instruction of these subjects. From these discussions, the values and beliefs held by students and their larger cultures should be utilized in art curricula as a means personalizing and relating art education to each individual in the class. Culturally responsive art education will include the perspectives of students from historically marginalized groups that are often ignored in Euro-centric art curriculums ([Wasson, Stuhr & Petrovich-Mwaniki, 1990](#)).

World Language

Analysis of Current K-12 Curricula

World Language curriculums are increasingly focused on learning the cultural and historical contexts behind the language itself. FPS World Language Curriculum makes explicit and consistent mention of developing and maintaining effective cultural competency in each language course offered to students, a crucial component to effective World Language instruction (FPS, 2015). Culturally competent and anti-racist world langauge education is important because teaching another language inevitably involves social judgements outside of the literal language itself. Teaching a language is a process that will, intentionally or unintentionally, "make claims about what a language is and is not, [decide] who sets the rules as to what is 'correct' and 'incorrect' language use, and produce and reproduce structures of power." (Osborn, 2018). The framing and content of the World Language curriculum is heavily influenced by explicit or implicit subjective judgements that can, in turn, affect the learner's mindset. We must ensure that language continues to be taught with respect for the nations and cultures to which it belongs, while avoiding subjective judgements that attempt to value one group or perspective over another.

Recommendations for Improvement of K-12 Curricula

Further incorporate social justice issues into world language courses. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) developed a public document entitled *Words and Actions, Teaching Languages Through the Lens of Social Justice* (Oxford, 2016). This resource explains the importance of World Language courses incorporating lessons of social justice issues, both domestic and international, in the classroom. This document provides the theory behind incorporating social justice lessons into the World Language classroom, training for teachers to prepare for these discussions, and an example curriculum with instructions on how to adapt existing lesson plans and units. This resource may supplement the existing FPS World Language curriculum to ensure its overarching goal of cultural competency is met.

Health

Analysis of Current K-12 Curricula

FPS Health curriculum develops a student's understanding of how to remain healthy, both physically and mentally, largely through individual choices (FPS, 2006; FPS, 2011; FPS, 2011). Importantly, peer pressure and other interpersonal factors are discussed throughout the curriculum as additional ways one makes a decision (FPS, 2020). Health curriculum emphasis should continue to include how to prepare the individual to make choices regarding their mental and physical health as the current curriculum does well. However, this information is taught in a vacuum devoid of socioeconomic, cultural or racial context. There is no explicit acknowledgement or exploration of the larger **social determinants of health**, like **systemic racism** and financial access, which lead BIPOC individuals to have reduced access to healthcare, be misdiagnosed, receive poorer care, and be undertreated (Perzichilli, 2020). Teaching students not only the ways in which to stay healthy, but the reasons why health outcomes vary between groups of people, will give them much needed understanding of the larger systems at play, and empower students to navigate them better.

Recommendations for Improvement to K-12 Curricula

Expand health education to include the social determinants of health (SDoH). This is a large undertaking that can be applied to nearly every current topic in FPS' Health curriculum. Understanding how our society influences health outcomes is one way students can contextualize their individual health outcomes and options in their larger social systems. A logical starting place to incorporate SDoH into the Health curriculum is differing health outcomes and their causes. Any resulting discussion about health outcomes across variables like socioeconomic status, geographic region, and race, however, must include an anti-racist lens to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes and misconceptions. The Society of Teachers of Family Medicine published a Toolkit for Teaching About Racism in the Context of Healthcare Disparities (STFM, 2017). This document provides definitions, videos, and articles that detail the underlying mechanisms which lead to different health outcomes amongst races as a result of historical and institutional racism (STFM, 2017). This toolkit may act as excellent reference material to incorporate SDoH into K-12 health education.

Conclusion

In order to decolonize curricula and promote anti-racism in the classroom across all subjects and grade levels, teachers must accurately incorporate racially-diverse perspectives, and in doing so, eradicate harmful misconceptions or inaccuracies that exist in current curricula. The process of decolonizing curricula, while most easily understood in the context of History, English, and other humanities courses, must occur in all subject areas. While public education has a responsibility to inform students of the many horrific ways racism, in all its forms, influences the past and present, anti-racism education also requires the celebration of different races, cultures, and their contributions to society. Efforts to revitalize curricula should be intentionally made with the specific lenses of decolonization and anti-racism, so students can recognize their own personal biases and the institutional factors that contribute to systemic racism, while appreciating their identities along with those that differ from their own. The resulting effects of these reforms will be a class of students more accepting, inquisitive, and understanding of racial identity and the way it interacts with our society and the larger world.

Summary of Recommendations:

Social Studies
- *Create conversations around fairness and the racism experienced by BIPOC people.*
- *Alter curriculum to explicitly teach about racism, anti-racism, and marginalized peoples' histories, from their perspectives.*
- *Change curriculum to correct false narratives and add new electives*

English
- *Include books which talk about racial identity and racial prejudice.*
- *Alter curriculum to explicitly include and amplify diverse authors.*

STEM
- *Alter curriculum to explicitly acknowledge the contributions of BIPOC scientists to content taught in STEM classes*
- *Highlight teachers' identities.*

- *Tailor class structure to student demographics and needs.*
- *Rephrase and restructure opportunities for students to ask questions.*
- *Include identity affirming activities in class.*
- *Include conversations about racial injustice in STEM across the relevant subject areas.*

Music and Art
- *Music: Diversify composers and genres studied and performed.*
- *Art: Move towards culturally responsive art education.*

World Language
- *Further incorporate social justice issues into world language courses.*

Health
- *Expand health education to include the social determinants of health (SDoH).*

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Actionable Change No. 2 - Implement mandatory anti-racism, implicit bias, and restorative justice training led by independent professionals for all faculty and staff on a frequent and ongoing basis.

Student Perspectives

"[the] inequitable treatment to students of color by teachers and administration" - Class of 2016 on their personal or witnesses experience of racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher or adminstrator at FPS.

"the latin teacher at FLHS said the N word in my class and thought it was okay" - on their personal or witnesses experience of racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher or adminstrator at FPS.

"While I have not had teachers do things directly to me, I have had teachers do nothing about what other students do. Complacency feels the same as direct discrimination." - Class of 2022 on their personal or witnesses experience of racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher or adminstrator at FPS.

"I clearly remember an instance when a student was taken out of class at FWMS so they could translate for someone visiting the school. Turns out the student not only didn't know the language - Mandarin - but they also weren't Chinese. The administration just assumed that because the student was Asian, they would know the language. First of all, the fact that they asked a student to translate and took them out of class is problematic in and of itself, but there's also the fact that they assumed the student would know the language because they were Asian. The thing about this situation is that it's very easy to say that it's not that deep. After all, no one was offended in the end - in fact, the student laughed when they came back and things went on as usual. However, it's still a glaring example of the smaller ways that people just assume things. Another instance is when my homeroom teacher asked me how to pronounce my last name prior to 8th grade graduation so he could say it correctly. After several times of me correcting his pronunciation, he called me "spicy". I'm Indian, so it was very clearly a race thing. I was so supremely uncomfortable that I immediately said I had to go to the bathroom and left the room." - Class of 2021

Faculty and Staff Perspectives

"Paraprofessional - I am not in a role to make these choices, only to follow through with what certified staff has implemented." - Elementary teacher on incorporating and promoting anti-racist principles within their specific role.

"The change needs to start with the adults reflecting and acknowledging their own biases First." - Elementary School teacher on what they want to see changed within the FPS curriculum, specifically regarding anti-racism and anti-Blackness.

"I would like to see more than just a "Black History Month". I would love to see these topics regularly incorporated into curriculum and into individual/group support discussions. I would love to see a more diverse teaching and support staff. It would be helpful for teachers and support staff to be trained in how to incorporate these teachings into everyday classroom life and how to manage if conflict arises. Facilitation, communication and leadership skills are imperative!" - Ninth-Twelfth Grade teacher on what they want to see changed within the FPS curriculum, specifically regarding anti-racism and anti-Blackness.

"We haven't had any substantial anti-racist trainings. We need to get training so that we understand how to teach anti-racist pedagogy in a sensitive way to our varied population of students. Under the current atmosphere, some are avoiding teaching anything related to race for a fear of doing emotional harm to students." - Ninth-Twelfth Grade teacher.

"If you actually want to change the way people think and teach, you've got to have a long-term, well-planned, consistently executed program of teacher education. This would include things like reading and discussing relevant articles about race, racism, and anti-racist work (inside and outside of the classroom). I think we did that once at a meeting last year, for maybe an hour, and it was awkward because it felt out-of-context and was not well facilitated. Maybe some "one-book-one-faculty" kind of PD might be useful." - Eleventh and Twelfth Grade teacher.

"The most impactful training would include instructional techniques, including curriculum support materials, that give teachers a framework on which to organize these difficult conversations. In addition, teachers need the explicit support from administrators to have these difficult conversations, particularly when these practices may be questioned by parents." - Middle School teacher.

"We have not had mandatory training on anti racist teaching. We have had conversations with students in workshops to open our eyes and begin to change our thinking but not on how to teach" - Ninth-Twelfth Grade teacher.

"It's a very difficult topic to broach respectfully and understand fully." - High School teacher on the trainings would be beneficial to allow them to confidently implement anti-racism principles.

"Trainings that explore systematic racism, particularly bias and how racism affects students and staff within a school building and across a district. I think many people are blind to the impact and reality of systematic racism but would be open to learning and exploring." - Elementary school teacher.

Introduction

The ability to have productive discussions and think critically about racism in our society is an essential skill for administrators and educators alike that must be developed in concert with curriculum content. As FPS shifts towards a more **culturally-competent**, narratively-inclusive form of education, it is imperative that faculty are equipped with the intellectual and pedagogical frameworks to confront personal biases and challenge bigotry. FEC strongly believes FPS must develop a comprehensive enrichment program that aids staff members in developing anti-racist, socially aware mentalities to make quick, effective, and restorative choices when dealing with racially-complex (or overtly racist) situations. First, we strongly recommend the implementation of mandatory culturally-competent pedagogy training across all disciplines, which will introduce staff to novel educational methodologies that reimagine how to have difficult conversations respectfully and constructively. Second, we propose across the board **implicit bias** training, which helps teachers to recognize the underlying stereotypes and assumptions that shape their perspectives. Third, we urge that **restorative justice** training be put into practice, which prioritizes understanding, empathy, and accountability over traditional punishment. Finally, we advocate for

de-escalation training, which will keep intense situations involving educators and students from mushrooming out of control. It is our sincere hope that these trainings, a crucial step among many, will guide the educational future of the FPS, so that difficult conversations reach better outcomes.

Research

Significant consensus exists around the idea that better education on race is essential to promoting **equity** in the classroom. Former New York City teacher and current Assistant Professor of Education at UC Berkeley, Travis Bristol, said "I believe... the work of forming a more perfect union requires us to enact anti-racist teaching [and] requires us to prepare teachers to think about how to design anti-racist teaching" (Chang, Et Al. 2020). Pirette Mckamey, former Principal

Did you ever witness racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher, peer or administrator at FPS?

of Mission High School in San Francisco and an anti-racism educator, argues the difference between a teacher trained in anti-racism practices and one who is not can mean the difference between an A and a C grade for a Black student (Mckamey, 2020). Valora Washington, a researcher and authority on early childhood education from the University of North Carolina, notes that multicultural education, where students accurately learn about many cultures outside of their own, can improve students' behavior in classrooms (Washington, 1981).
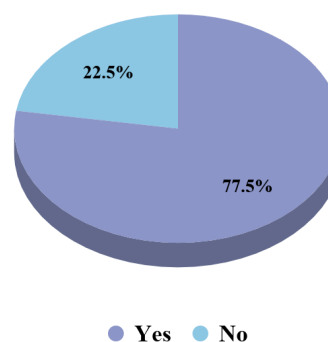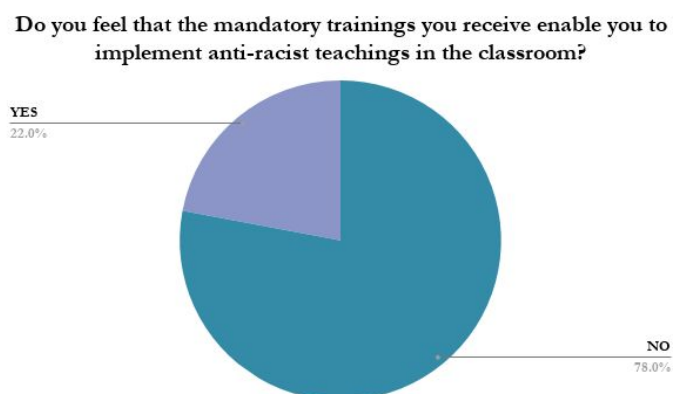

Not only students experience racial harassment or discrimination at FPS; 64% of respondents to our teacher and staff survey also responded to the above question in the affirmative.

Though FPS has some existing infrastructure around training teachers on race and equity issues, there exist a number of ways in which it can be improved. FPS' current equity infrastructure can benefit from more explicit guidelines and objectives. The "School Climate Specialist," for example, exists within a larger system that can be reworked to extensively monitor a school's morale and investigate ways to improve overall climate. Currently, this specialist, along with associated members of the school climate team, is required to "Plan and implement...annual training for School Climate Team members, create...annual training modules for school employees, [and] ensure that all school employees receive annual training" (FPS, 2012).

The lack of explicit qualifications needed to become a School Climate Specialist and assume the above responsibilities create the potential for ineffective -- or even harmful -- outcomes. Since 2011, every school principal either serves as, or designates from existing staff, a School Climate Specialist (FPS, 2012). On the district level, the Superintendent of schools designates, from existing staff, a District School Climate Coordinator (FPS, 2012). Because these specialists are chosen from an existing pool of staff, who may or may not have adequate anti-racist training, there is no guarantee that the staff member selected is truly qualified for the important job of Climate Specialist. With this in mind, although all teachers should receive anti-racist training, it is especially important that the staff member in charge of overseeing school climate receives extensive training on how to lead and teach other educators in anti-racism.

Though the Climate Specialist is seemingly in charge of most training on race that teachers receive, the district additionally brought in four outside experts to speak to administrators about "equity and diversity" between March 2017 and March 2019 (FPS, 2020). Though these presentations served important functions, training on anti-racism in the classroom setting must be consistent, thorough, and comprehensive so every faculty and staff member is equipped to teach and/or handle matters relating to race. The FPS website notes that teachers will be trained in equity and diversity and summaries of this training would be "updated [by] June 10th, 2019" (FPS, 2020). Given that this page was never updated, however, FEC must assume these trainings were not administered (FPS, 2020). Actionable Change No. 10 details accountability mechanisms that ensure important trainings on anti-racist principles and structures are actualized.

Do you feel that the mandatory trainings you receive enable you to implement anti-racist teachings in the classroom?

YES 22.0%

NO 78.0%

With 78% of respondents to our teacher and staff survey suggesting they are ill-equipped to incorporate anti-racism into their role at FPS, there is ample need for these trainings to be developed and incorporated into regular professional development.

While FPS has implemented positions within the district that are tasked with developing a positive school climate, its schools lack a robust and comprehensive training infrastructure that deals with the actual implementation of anti-racism principles in both course curricula and student behavior mitigation. Without such a training infrastructure, teachers will remain uncomfortable in dealing with topics and incidents involving race, perpetuating racial tension and hostility within the district.

As the student and faculty/staff quotes listed at the start of this Actionable Change show, there are many examples of FPS employees ignoring or outright mishandling incidents of racism or racially insensitive situations directed at their students or coworkers, suggesting the need for extensive and regular training in the topics outlined in this section.

Implementation

Ample opportunities exist to implement extensive anti-racism training in order to both inform curriculum development, specifically how to teach sensitive topics like racism, and disciplinary practices, in terms of dealing with the initiators and recipients of racist acts. We understand these reforms, like many others in the report, require changes to funding mechanisms. For more information on financing these reforms, see Actionable Change No. 10.
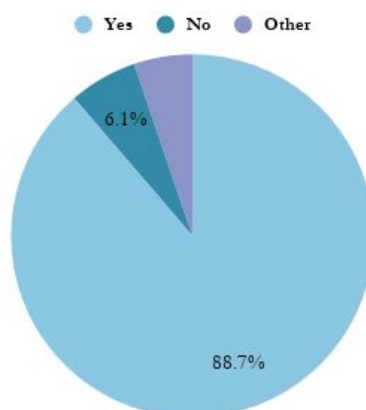
The vast majority of respondents (88.7%) to our teacher and staff survey felt that they should incorporate anti-racism principles in their role at FPS.

Require culturally competent pedagogy training. Teachers must not only have extensive training to teach the content of their subject area, but must be trained specifically in *how* to broach difficult subjects like racism and prejudice, particularly in the fields that deal with race directly, such as History and English. As earlier discussion of our teacher survey responses indicates, many FPS educators want to fully and honestly engage in conversations around past and present racism, but feel unable to adequately navigate

these areas with the required respect and knowledge. Therefore, new training programs must engage with the "how" behind each lesson. Material and instruction that is **culturally competen**t discusses difference (be it race, socioeconomic status, gender, or any other identity) in appropriate, accurate, and respectful ways (NCCC, 2004). Teachers who are culturally competent adopt a mindset and set of behaviors that enable them to navigate situations in which people of different backgrounds are present (NCCC, 2004). In turn, students will develop cultural competency and learn to appreciate and seek out different types of perspectives and people (NCCC, 2004). The National Education Association, of which FPS is an affiliate, offers several trainings dealing with cultural competency broadly and particular identities specifically, like different racial groups and the LGBTQIA+ community. See Appendix III for a list of these trainings and their contacts.

Improve implicit bias training. Implicit biases are ubiquitous among every person and are best understood as an inevitable part of human nature that must be mitigated through the intentional unlearning of these perceptions. The goal behind implicit bias training is not the perfect elimination of these biases, but the development of a skillset that enables teachers to first recognize instances of their own bias to then unlearn them (Harper, 2019). It should be noted that the destructive nature of implicit bias is magnified tenfold in the classroom, where teachers and administrators are responsible for developing the mindset, both academic and interpersonal, of their pupils. If a teacher allows their implicit bias to act unchecked, they can harm the future educational outcomes and general wellbeing of White students and, in particular, BIPOC students. (Schwartz, 2019). Implicit bias against BIPOC students can manifest in several ways, whether through disproportionate and harmful disciplinary actions or mis-evaluating their academic and social progress. These biases transcend one's immediate education and affect long-lasting decisions like determining a BIPOC student's eligibility for gifted and other advanced courses. There is well-documented evidence that BIPOC students are disproportionately excluded from higher level courses based largely on the implicit biases of teachers (Schwartz, 2019). See Actionable Change No. 5 for further elaboration on the segregated outcomes of tracking programs.

Implement restorative justice training. Restorative justice empowers every member in the educational environment by taking a non-traditional approach to disciplinary action. Instead of using punitive measures to punish the behavioral offender, the school community, under a restorative justice model, emphasizes empathy and accountability (Allen, 2020). Traditional forms of punishment can actually exacerbate inequality, and can lead to a much higher rate of suspension and expulsion (Sower, 2017). Implicit bias mixed with traditional disciplinary practices can be a truly destructive mix for BIPOC students, and often lead to a much higher rate of punishment among marginalized populations (Lopez, 2018). Restorative justice training also helps teachers build a more understanding, empathetic learning environment. When disciplinary practices are centered around teaching pupils about how to respect each other and build accountability, students become more invested in their learning environment, and feel they owe more respect to their peers, which can greatly enrich the learning environment for all students.

Implement de-escalation training. De-escalation training is similar to the restorative justice practices previously mentioned, but is used specifically in crisis situations. The main goal of de-escalation training is to prevent injury or physical confrontation if a student becomes distraught (Kerns, 2005). Though uncommon, a violent or out-of-control student can be easily mismanaged, leaving the aggravated student more alienated, confused, and irritated than they would otherwise be with the proper mitigation tactics. De-escalation uses strategies such as active listening and open, empathetic communication to resolve a conflict or argument peacefully (Kerns, 2005). If executed effectively, de-escalation tactics not only prevent physical harm for both students and teachers, but also create stronger bonds in a school community. These tactics will improve the overall school climate, because if a student under extreme distress is met with calm and empathy, staff and student relationships will remain intact. Often, a student only wishes to be heard and listened to, and clearly demonstrating one's attentiveness can solve the problem.

There are many hiring firms and organizations, like The Center for Racial Justice in Education (Center For Racial Justice, 2020) and Race Forward (Race Forward, 2020), that lead trainings in de-escalation, restorative justice, and implicit bias. All of these organizations offer a myriad of in-depth and manageable courses on these subjects, and can help achieve the goals outlined in our other Actionable Changes. Actualizing our recommendations rests on the successful implementation of these trainings so teachers and staff are prepared for these reforms. For a more complete list of organizations and training options, see Appendix IV.

Conclusion

As our teacher survey and the national data suggest, many educators feel ill-equipped to instruct students about the complicated and important issues relating to race. The aforementioned trainings can help FPS teachers become more conscious of their school environment and the social dynamics that extend beyond lesson plans and instruction. These trainings collectively develop an anti-racist mindset and practice, ensuring racism is effectively taught and dealt with in FPS. We recommend the implementation of culturally-competent pedagogy training for all faculty and staff, inspiring teachers to perform introspective analysis of both their disciplines and roles in the school community. Similarly, we also propose required implicit bias training, which plainly exposes the ways in which prejudice subtly informs decision-making. We emphatically encourage restorative justice training, in order to reduce harm and strengthen the bonds of the community. Furthermore, we advocate for de-escalation training to prevent violent or aggravated student outbursts. Finally, we firmly maintain that these trainings must be conducted frequently in order to effectively develop a faculty and staff that stands squarely and proudly against bigotry, intolerance, and racism.

> ***Summary of Recommendations***:
> - *Require culturally competent pedagogy training.*
> - *Improve implicit bias training.*
> - *Implement restorative justice training.*
> - *Implement de-escalation training.*

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Actionable Change No. 3 - Implement mandatory presentations, courses, and training across all grade levels where students will learn about the social construction of racial and cultural identity and its influence on themselves and others.

Student Perspectives

"students say the n word all the time" - on their personal or witnesses experience of racial insensitivity or discrimination from a peer at FPS.

"Speakers are so amazing for people to hear stories. a cultural day where we go around and hear a little bit about different cultures a over the world is a great way for representation and exposure to different cultures (show that they are "weird" but beautiful because they are different)" - Class of 2023

"Native American education from actual Native Americans please!! And bring in speakers of color!! Not just white men and women!!" - Class of 2016 on the field trips, speakers, or experiences that would have been beneficial to integrate into a class.

"I think having more speakers that are BIPOC will greatly impact students' experiences. Since I had no teachers of color, I would have loved to listen to speakers that were BIPOC. I think students learn a lot from people's first hand experiences." - Class of 2014

"I think we need more speakers in general. Maybe someone to talk about black lives matter and how it is to be a Person of color in ct" - Class of 2022 on the field trips, speakers, or experiences that would have been beneficial to integrate into a class."

"I think diversity training for students and staff for different backgrounds with different speakers would be very important." - Class of 2022 on the field trips, speakers, or experiences that would have been beneficial to integrate into a class.

"I love how for black history month the librarians created a scavenger hunt so that we could learn about achievements of a few Black people. again,[sic] representation is so important. although we only talked about black history month in one class and it was on like the 23th so there's definitely more to do within the month-and more to do in other months celebrating different cultures/ethnicity/diversity, etc" - Class of 2023

Introduction

Race is a social construct. Our increasing scientific understanding of racial differences reveals no meaningful biological differences amongst races (Gannon, 2016). Any perceived differences stem from cultural and other social factors (Gannon, 2016). Although races have no true biological distinctions, the social impact and consequences derived from our historical and present treatment of race cannot be understated. Racial distinctions were historically treated as paramount determinants of one's ability and justified through so-called science to oppress people not considered "White" (Coates, 2013). The U.S. census provides a prime example of this unfounded and racist justification (Parker et.al 2015). The first

census in 1790 had three racial categories: free Whites, all other free persons, and enslaved people. Over time, the label 'slaves' became 'colored' and then 'negro' (which was only removed from the census in 2013), and anyone remotely mixed race was either considered 'colored' (via the 'one drop rule', meaning even one drop of non-White 'blood' meant you are not White) or was quantitifed in their divergence from Whiteness, creating categories like 'quadroons' and 'octaroons' (¼ or ⅛ Black 'blood', respectively). Even today, Whiteness is an ambiguous concept to define; many people of middle-eastern ethnicity, for example, do not self-identify as White, even though others might view them as such (Parvini & Simani, 2019). This example shows how race is not a stagnant, objective reality. Rather, it is a social construct that has been used to privilege some and oppress others. Harmful biases and stereotypes persist today from our historical prejudiced understandings of different races and inform one's own racial identity and perceptions of different racial groups. These perceptions must be actively un-taught in favor of tolerant, thoughtful, and accepting understandings of racial differences.
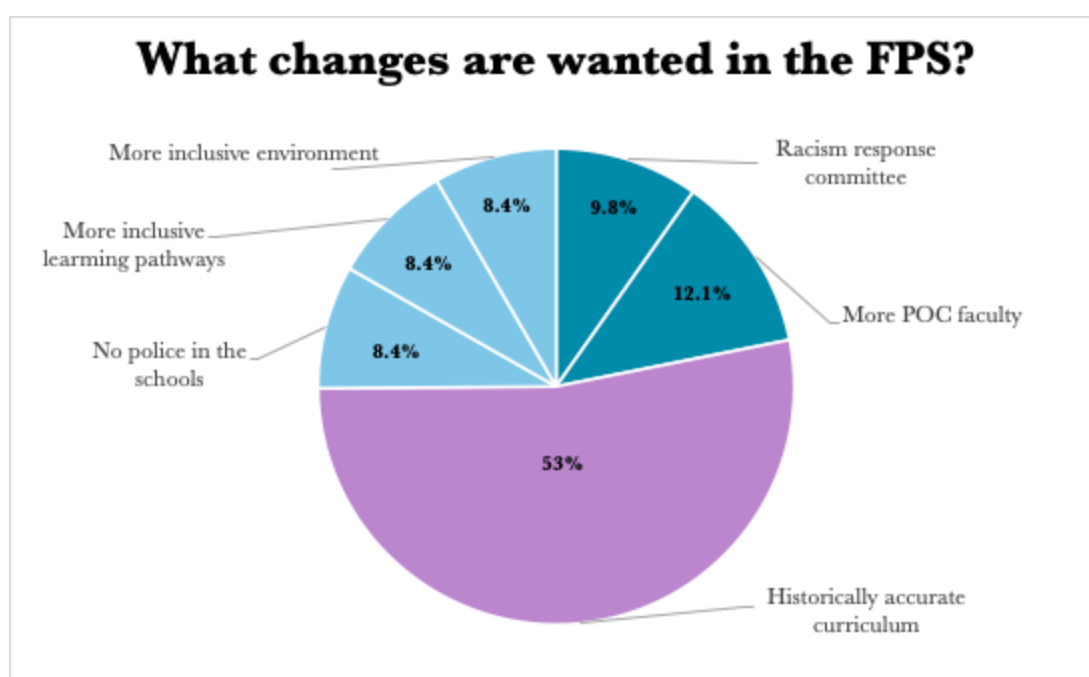
Some of the desires of respondents expressed in this graphic can be actualized through presentations, field trips, and other measures outlined in this section that extend beyond specific curriculum reform. This is especially evident in the desires of a more inclusive environment and learning pathways, which can be achieved through mandatory presentations, courses, and training on racial and cultural identity.

Education is a powerful tool that can be used to combat racist beliefs and promote allyship. In order to harness the power of education, it is important that students gain the knowledge and resources necessary to address our country's history of marginalization and oppression and its impact on the social structures of today. We call upon FPS to make a firm commitment to developing anti-racist educational programs that are supplemental to **decolonized curricula**. It is not enough to celebrate diversity and multiculturalism in our schools; FPS must implement mandatory presentations and activities in the form of readings, screenings, assemblies, and field trips which serve to supplement anti-racist curricula. Doing so will educate students on their own biases, create a welcoming environment for students of all races and

ethnicities, strengthen the school community as a whole, and help prepare FPS students for success in an increasingly global society.

As the student perspectives at the beginning of this Actionable Change suggest, respondents to our surveys consistently recommended the development of materials and instruction outside of curriculum to supplement anti-racism education. The quotes which shared personal or witnessed accounts of racist remarks further suggest these principles must be incorporated holistically in the school environment.
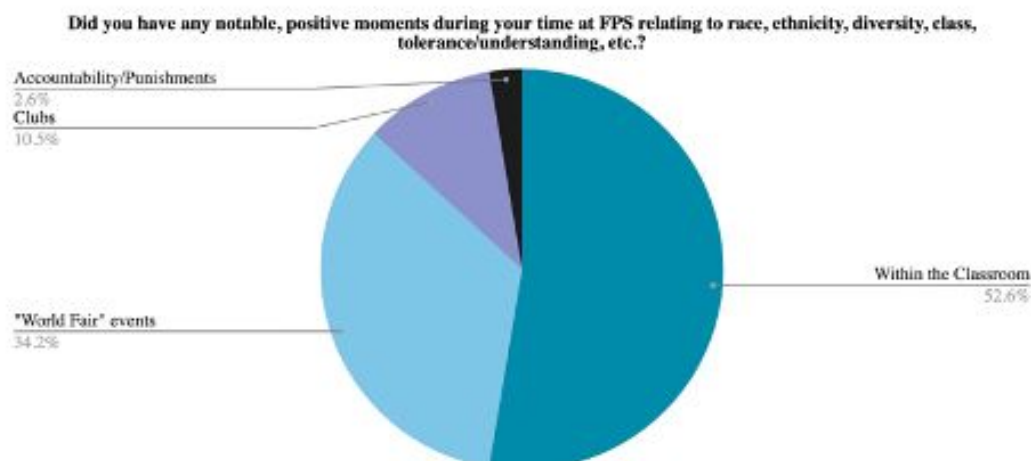
Research

The Impacts of Interpersonal Racism on BIPOC Students

As an institution that seeks to provide an exceptional education to all of its students, FPS has a responsibility to create and uphold a welcoming and safe environment for all. Unfortunately, interpersonal racism – where individuals hold and act upon racist beliefs against others – persists in schools today (Masko, 2014). In addition to the immediate harm caused by peer-to-peer racist interactions, there are significant long-term effects for **BIPOC** students who must endure discrimination and harrassment on a continued basis. When a BIPOC student is forced to spend large amounts of time and energy coping with **microaggressions** and other racist or racially-insensitive interactions, their self-confidence and resulting academic drive will suffer (Parsons, 2017). If racial identity is promoted in positive and unprejudiced ways, however, academic achievement is improved. A positive relationship exists between centering race in one's academic identity and their academic performance, suggesting that embracing racial identity by both faculty and students leads to better educational outcomes (Ross, Powell & Henriksen, 2016). In order to foster a climate in which all of its students have the best opportunity to succeed, FPS has a responsibility to combat racist behavior via educational programs that are explicitly and actively anti-racist and inclusive.

Furthermore, research has shown that BIPOC students in predominantly White institutions, colloquially referred to as PWIs, experience more racial discrimination and harrassment than in racially diverse institutions. One study that followed 1,659 Black students from two Midwestern school districts in the same school system – one predominately Black and the other predominately White – looked at associations between racial identity beliefs, racial discrimination, and academic engagement. Researchers found that BIPOC students experienced more discrimination in the predominately White school district, which negatively impacted their motivation and engagement in the classroom (Leath, 2019). Since FPS is majority-White, it is particularly important that the district teaches all students about the ways in which their actions, intentional or otherwise, impact their peers, so as to provide a welcoming and safe environment in which all students can succeed (Edsight, 2019).

The Benefits of Anti-Racism Teachings outside of Classroom Lessons

Teaching **anti-racism** and acceptance of different identities can also be effective through experiential opportunities that exist outside of the classroom setting. Field trips, for example, are an excellent method of learning. Researchers at the University of Arkansas found that field trips increase student empathy, tolerance, and critical thinking skills (Greene, Kisida & Bowen, 2013).

Did you have any notable, positive moments during your time at FPS relating to race, ethnicity, diversity, class, tolerance/understanding, etc.?

Accountability/Punishments
2.6%
Clubs
10.5%

Within the Classroom
52.6%

"World Fair" events
34.2%

Of the respondents who experienced positive moments related to diversity and/or tolerance at FPS, the majority (52.6%) experienced them within the classroom setting. Another common response conveying these positive moments was the "World Fair events" hosted by respondents' individual schools. This type of event, like the other measures outlined in this section, should be considered as potential opportunities to expand anti-racism education outside of the FPS curriculum itself.

WHAT EXTRACURRICULAR EXPERIENCES SHOULD FPS OFFER TO ENHANCE LEARNING ABOUT RELEVANT SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES?

8.80% of respondents thought we should have field trips to historically black locations

13.89% of respondents thought we should have a culture date where guest BIPOC speakers and other version of representation are brought in to immerse all students

6.94% of respondents recommended we institute breakout groups where people can talk about their experiences with homophobia/racism/sexism/etc. so others can learn from their experiences.

17.13% of respondents recommended we create volunteer opportunities to give back to communities that have been disadvantaged by racism (such as redlining, food deserts, etc.)

11.11% of respondents recommended we start joint ventures with the Bridgeport school district

14.35% of respondents recommended we start a Black student association

9.72% of respondents recommended there be a protest group/civic engagement opportunities

11.11% of respondents recommended we start a social justice club

Because most students share excitement over field trips, they will be primed to learn about the given topic. Learning at these locations is often hands-on and inherently different from the classroom setting, which increases engagement in a given subject (Whitesell, 2015). Field trips that explore different racial identities and cultures - particularly if they are conducted by people of the studied identity - can help to supplement student education on diversity and culture. They provide an opportunity for students to build a nuanced understanding of people and cultures that differ from their own experience.

Bringing guest speakers into the district to describe the social construction behind racial and cultural identity can also be an effective way to supplement classroom learning. Importantly, though, presentations must be orientated towards an interactive, hands-on style so students do not passively disengage from the material discussed (Leor, 2015). Research shows that the measurable success of guest speaker presentations varies based on the type of learners the students are; however,

engagement with and retention of the speaker's lesson increases when the presentation style actively involves student participation (Leor, 2015). Guest speakers might be logistically more feasible for school districts compared to field trips, and can effectively engage students on the topics of racial and cultural identity. As we note throughout this report, the most effective way to teach about racial and cultural identity is when the speaker is of that specific identity; not only does that ensure a diversity of perspectives is achieved, but that the school values and seeks out first-hand accounts of identity so as not to misrepresent them.

Finally, where possible, students should also be given the opportunity to attend assemblies and presentations on racism, anti-racism, implicit bias, and other relevant matters relating to race, much like those discussed in Actionable Change No. 2.

Implementation

Implementation of the above findings should take multiple forms. This section will make recommendations for the implementation of anti-racist materials, assemblies, speakers, and field trips based on suggestions from Teaching Tolerance, an organization that provides extensive free resources on developing inclusive and accepting learning environments, many of which are cited throughout this report. Once again, potential funding mechanisms can be found in Actionable Change No. 10.

Texts

Teachers can utilize books to start discussions in their classroom about race and diversity at all age levels. These texts can act as supplements to curricula within classrooms, and/or be assigned as schoolwide readings to be discussed during an advisory period.

Using literature is an effective way to start the conversation because it makes the topic approachable for younger students if they see themselves reflected in the pages of a book. Books are akin to 'windows, mirrors and sliding doors' for younger students. For BIPOC students, it is important that they have their identities reflected and validated in the books they read. For all students, books can offer an opportunity for students to learn about individuals whose lived experiences differ from their own worldview. Literature can be diversified in public education both by reading stories about diversity, and reading texts by diverse (e.g. BIPOC, nonmale) authors (which was one of the most common requests made by students in our first student survey).

We Need Diverse Books is an organization that provides grants and resources to public schools that want to diversify their classroom libraries. This website can be used to identify books that highlight Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, Islamic, Jewish and LGBTQ+ perspectives. Find a complete grade by grade list of fiction texts that amplify BIPOC voices in Appendix V.

Assemblies

Elementary schools. FEC strongly recommends that special events such as Diversity Week at Roger Sherman and Osborn Hill Elementary Schools be reformed and expanded into continuous programming. Research suggests it is important to develop special diversity events into ongoing efforts outside of

reforming curriculum itself (Anti-Defamation League, 2008). With this approach, the topics of race and identity can be explored in depth and students can apply their learning in a broader context.

However, first and foremost, existing and future programming must lead with the mindset that 'diversity' does not mean a temporary ogling at people; rather, Diversity Week and other continued programming should be explored with nuance and the true variety of intersecting racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, gender-based, and sexuality-based identity markers that students carry. It is important to hold both the celebration of these identities and the acknowledgement of the very real oppression certain groups face together to avoid romanticizing and fetishizing cultures. More specifically, when organizing an event, we call upon FPS to consider the demographics of the student body to avoid further marginalizing groups and reinforcing stereotypes or assumptions (Anti-Defamation League, 2008). While the intentions of an event may be to celebrate diversity and promote inclusion, students who represent a given identity in the school body should not be tokenized to stand in for those of their racial or ethnic background as a whole. All students' experiences of their identities are unique, and thus the approach should not be guided by the assumption that students from a **marginalized group** share a homogenous perspective. Schools should also avoid the dangerous assumption that students who are middle-class, White, Christian and/or heterosexual, i.e. those understood to be in the 'norm,' do not have cultures, traditions or experiences to share. All students should be encouraged to share their cultures, as well as to explore the power and **privilege** dynamics between them, recognizing the diversity between and within every sector of the student body (Anti-Defamation League, 2008). FEC recommends that special diversity events be conducted from the perspective of mutual learning rather than polarized assumptions. We also strongly encourage the recruitment of **diverse** speakers. When events such as Diversity Week are thoughtfully designed and integrated into the rest of school culture, they can become more effective in facilitating cross-cultural and cross-racial understanding. We also suggest that teachers use social justice guidelines from Teaching Tolerance, and facilitate discussions of race and inequity through film screenings.

Middle and high schools. FEC urges FPS to shift away from one-off diversity events and towards a deeper, thoughtful, intentional, and more long-term plan for racial **equity** programming. For example, following up with reflection and discussion after events such as Fairfield Ludlowe High School's Truth About Hate assembly would deepen students' understanding, allow further space for students to share their personal feelings, and foster a sense of community in the classroom. As a long-term goal, it is critical that FPS addresses diversity, **equity**, and inclusion in every school by elevating the voices of BIPOC speakers in school-wide or grade-level assemblies (Bauer, 2020). It is equally important that FPS avoids holding assemblies as a one-time event, and instead uses them as a vehicle for further discussion. Assemblies are most successful when they empower students to continue their learning on racial injustice and connect with overarching efforts to transform school culture (Anti-Defamation League, 2008). Find a list of relevant assemblies and speakers in Appendix VI.

Trainings and Programs
Middle School
Add to the middle school Character Education Program. FEC recommends that FPS updates the implementation guide for the middle school Character Education Program (Roger Ludlowe Middle School, 2020). Eighth Grade students at Roger Ludlowe have the opportunity to discuss and model

positive character traits with Sixth Grade students, including reliability, resourcefulness, and respect (Roger Ludlowe Middle School, 2020). We call upon FPS to shift this program to include discussion on inclusivity in which older students are consciously trained to teach their younger counterparts to actively include and value the perspectives of diverse peers (Roger Ludlowe Middle School, 2020). This change in focus, however subtle, will empower students to be upstanders, instead of bystanders, for equity. Similarly, the Seventh Grade Anti-Bullying Program incorporates a lesson on "Moving Towards Solidarity" which should have a prominent focus on racial inclusion (Roger Ludlowe Middle School, 2019).

High School
Offer a wider range of diversity-oriented electives. High schools should offer a variety of elective courses which dive deeply into a specific facet of diversity. FEC recommends that FPS appends a wider range of electives. For reference, Staples High School offers more diverse area study/elective courses including African Studies, East Asian Studies, Latin American Studies, and Middle East Studies (SHS, 2020). FEC also advises that FPS adopts social justice electives, similar to the Social Justice Course outlined by Bayfront Charter High School in California (Castillo, 2019). We understand the larger difficulty in the short term of having these courses taught by teachers who identify as part of the studied community. If these courses must be taught by a teacher who does not identify with the community, great lengths must be made so the curriculum is centered around the voices and perspectives within the community and the teacher is equipped to speak appropriately and confidently on the subject.

Field Trips
Field trips can function as short-term experiential education, introducing students to new narratives and perspectives. When effectively connected with school curriculum, field trips can strengthen observation and perception skills and stimulate further reflection (Behrendt, 2014). Field trips would supplement curriculum to broaden students' understanding of the Indigenous and Black or African American experience, along with other marginalized groups, both in the past and present. For a list of field trip suggestions, see Appendix VII.

Conclusion
Anti-racism principles and lessons must be taught in ways that extend beyond proper curriculum. These methods, like assemblies, field trips, school-wide reading initiatives, and other trainings, complement curriculum by sharing experiential learning opportunities with students, actualizing what is taught to them in real, digestible, and sometimes tangible ways. FPS should develop extensive non-curricular opportunities for students to explore and celebrate racial identity and, importantly, to appreciate how race can be socially constructed with dire consequences.

> ***Summary of Recommendations***:
> - *Develop school-wide readings, assemblies, trainings, and field trips to explore racial identity and its social construction in addition to anti-racist classroom instruction.*

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Actionable Change No. 4 - Recruit, hire, and retain racially diverse, culturally competent school faculty and staff.

Student Perspectives

"There was one Black teacher when I attended FLHS. I am almost 100% certain that there are ZERO Black faculty/staff currently"

"There was not much diversity at all. Most of all of my teachers have been White for my entire life." - Class of 2023

"Not very diverse, would appreciate BIPOC staff in more authoritative positions. For example as a teacher, working in office" - Class of 2023

"Could be improved, I do not believe I ever had a black teacher or many POC as teachers during my 13 years in an FPS school." - Class of 2017

"There is absolutely no diversity in staff. In my time at FPS, I never had a teacher who was not White, and I didn't realize the impact that had until I moved and attended a school where there was diversity in staff. I was so excited to see someone who had the same background as me, and I remember thinking, "This is the first time I've had a teacher who is like me and who can relate to me,". Even just seeing their name on my schedule was huge - the first time I had seen a name that wasn't European, but rather similar to my own." - Class of 2021

"Terrible. This year most of my teachers are at least White passing (i shouldnt [sic] assume) and i don't think i've ever had a black, asian, middle eastern, teacher. it's especially important to see diversity at a young age because that's when kids are taught. and representing matters." - Class of 2023

"Hire more staff of color and train them in abolitionist teachings. Stop encouraging students to go abroad on mission trips- this only perpetuates the white savior complex. Our schools are also too segregated so the district lines should be redrawn"

"I had pretty much no teachers of color throughout my elementary, middle school, and high school time. Looking back it's pretty disappointing and I think it did reinforce feeling like I was in a very White town as a student of color." - Class of 2014

"We simply do not have enough teachers from different backgrounds whether it be racial diverse backgrounds or identity diversity. To put it simply we need more diversity in order to teach sensitive and important topics" - Class of 2022

"I have only had one teacher that was not White during my 4 years. I think that it is a huge disservice

to students as there is a lack of diversity of perspective." - Class of 2021

"If I had had more diverse teachers, I would have had a more well-rounded understanding of life earlier on." - Class of 2009

Faculty and Staff Perspectives

"*Better hiring/recruiting of bipoc teachers, listening to the bipoc community to their lived experience and believe them and make required changes for a more equitable education"* - Sixth-Eighth Grade teacher on what they want to see changed within the FPS curriculum, specifically regarding anti-racism and anti-Blackness.

"We have not had mandatory training on anti racist teaching. We have had conversations with students in workshops to open our eyes and begin to change our thinking but not on how to teach" - Ninth-Twelfth Grade teacher.

"It's a very difficult topic to broach respectfully and understand fully." - High School teacher on the trainings would be beneficial to allow them to confidently implement anti-racism principles.

"Trainings that explore systematic racism, particularly bias and how racism affects students and staff within a school building and across a district. I think many people are blind to the impact and reality of systematic racism but would be open to learning and exploring." - Elementary school teacher.

"I do it because it is something I am comfortable speaking about with my students, in a way that I think promotes healthy discussion, however I don't think there is any training or much discussion about race or being biased or anti-racist is discussed because I think the majority of people who do these trainings are white and perhaps uncomfortable or not sure how to have a discussion about this with staff. Perhaps there is a fear of saying the wrong thing or offending people. I think there needs to be an understanding that uncomfortable is okay in a safe space when trying to better yourself and examine racial biases." - Fifth Grade teacher

"In my time at FPS, anti-racism and social equity have not been discussed on a formal, systemic level. Any training or education I have had has been outside of FPS."- Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twentieth Grade teacher

"*There's no denying that most of us are white, and there's not a lot of diversity amongst staff and faculty. Most of our students are white, so it's great that those students can connect/identify with us, but it's important for ALL students to have at least one student they feel they can identify with, and it's also important for white students to be introduced to non-white teachers, staff, etc.*" - Eighth Grade Teacher

Introduction

Research strongly suggests that working and studying in predominantly White settings, similar to the demographic makeup of FPS, can harm both White students and BIPOC students. Homogeneous intellectual and cultural spaces often stifle rather than facilitate and expand academic and personal growth (Anderson, 2015). FEC recognizes the short term difficulty of increasing diversity within the district's student population so long as Fairfield remains predominantly White. However, FPS must hire more **BIPOC** faculty, the benefits of which are immediate and universal. In fact, ample research suggests that students of all races perform better when placed with BIPOC teachers. White students respect and
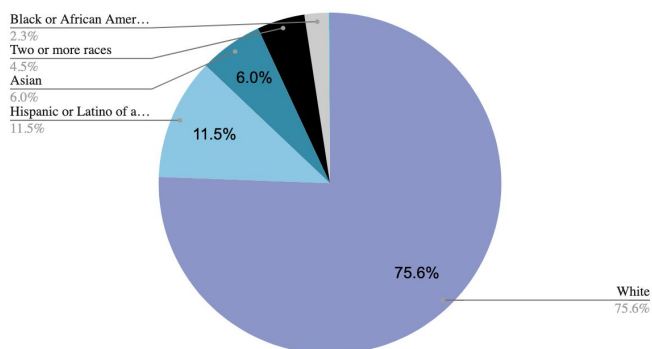
appreciate non-White leaders, and BIPOC students see themselves represented in their education, helping them respect and appreciate themselves and their potential (Anderson, 2015). Both teacher and student respondents to our surveys frequently called for more racial diversity in FPS staff and faculty. We understand FPS and the state at large have engaged in similar efforts to recruit a more diverse staff for several years. We hope this section re-emphasizes the importance of this effort while providing potential strategies to achieve this end.
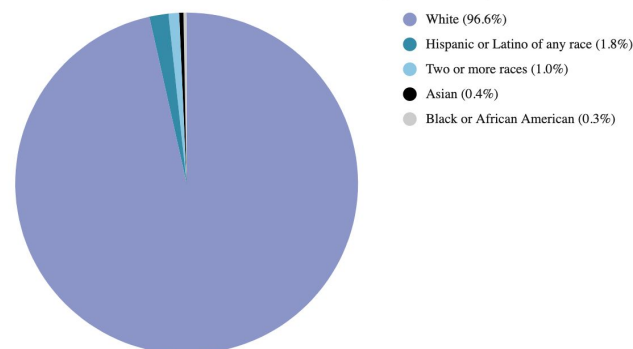
Research

In 2016 the U.S. Department of Education released *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce* (US Department of Education, 2016), which addressed the urgent need to increase educator diversity in schools across the country. According to projections, BIPOC students will comprise 56% of the total student population in the U.S. by 2024. In contrast, a mere 18% of the nation's teachers identify as BIPOC, and the disparity between White and BIPOC faculty only continues to widen (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2016). According to a recent George Mason University study, Black applicants made up 13% of the applicant pool for a single, large district but received 6% of the eventual job offers. Conversely, White applicants made up 70% of the applicant pool yet received 77% of job offers (D'Amico et.al, 2017). When equally qualified, White applicants were more likely to be hired than Black applicants. Black applicants who were hired were more likely to be placed in schools with large populations of BIPOC children or children in poverty and were more likely to be hired by a Black principal. (D'Amico et.al, 2017). It seems that explicit or implicit discriminatory hiring practices perpetuate racial disparities seen in faculty and staff compositions. This problem persists at the state level. As of January 2020, a report released by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) found 8.9% of Connecticut educators identify as BIPOC. While this proportion is on target with the state's goal to increase the proportion of BIPOC educators to 10% by 2021, CSDE "remains committed to diminishing the gap between educators and BIPOC students beyond the established goal, as 47% of CT's students identify as BIPOC"(Cardona, 2020). Teacher-student racial imbalances are a significant problem across the state, from which FPS is no exception.

In August of 2004, the BOE published a statement vowing to "actively seek candidates among minority groups for filling vacancies existing for all certified and non-certified positions in Fairfield Public Schools." (FPS Board of Education, 2004). However, over a decade later, FPS faculty/ demographic data does not reflect this promise. As of 2018/2019, 96.6% of FPS faculty identified as White, followed by 1.8% as Hispanic or Latinx, 1% as two or more races, 0.4% as Asian, and 0.3% as African American, while no one identified as of Indigenous descent (Jones, 2020). In other words, out of a staff of 1,014 people, only 36 of them identify as BIPOC faculty. This breakdown is not parallel to that of the student body, which is 76% White, 24% BIPOC. (Jones, 2020) If the racial composition of FPS faculty corresponded to that of the student body, the district would have 243 BIPOC faculty members, nearly a 700% *increase* from the current number. See the below graphics for a visual comparison of FPS student to faculty racial demographics:

FPS Racial/Ethnic Breakdown: Students (2018-2019)

Black or African Amer…
2.3%
Two or more races
4.5%
Asian
6.0%
Hispanic or Latino of a…
11.5%

6.0%

11.5%

75.6%

White
75.6%

FPS Racial/Ethnic Breakdown: Educators (2018-2019)

- White (96.6%)
- Hispanic or Latino of any race (1.8%)
- Two or more races (1.0%)
- Asian (0.4%)
- Black or African American (0.3%)

(source information)

The Importance of a Diverse Faculty and Staff

As previously mentioned, all students and the larger school environment benefit when faculty and staff are racially diverse. To perform well in the school setting and later in life, students' identities must be reflected in their learning environment. Interacting with only White teachers often alienates BIPOC students from the content being taught. Research suggests that BIPOC students who have at least one BIPOC teacher are less likely to be unfairly disciplined, more likely to do better on tests, more likely to graduate from high school and show greater interest in a college education. (Motamedi, 2019) For White students, it is imperative that they see not only those who are like themselves, but authority figures and role models of other races and cultures. Research suggests that White students show improved problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity when they have racially diverse teachers. (Motamedi, 2019).

Culturally Competent Pedagogy

Beyond having representative diversity in faculty, we must also ensure that all staff is equipped to teach about peoples other than themselves. No one individual can speak for their entire culture, nor should applicants be expected to know everything about their own or other cultures. Instead, **cultural competence** requires that teachers "understand culture and its role in education," "take responsibility for learning about their students' culture and community," and "interrogate their own identity, culture, biases, and **privilege** to critically assess and strengthen their instructional practice". (Escudero, 2019) To do this, teachers must use "their students' culture as the basis for learning," and help "students recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while accessing and learning about the wider world." (Escudero, 2019). This kind of pedagogy considers power dynamics, individual and institutional privilege, and the connection between power, privilege, and oppression. (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014). It is imperative that FPS teachers are equipped to teach with cultural competence, so as to make their students feel empowered and welcomed to explore both their own and others' cultures in a safe and honest way.

Implementation

Recruitment
How FPS finds and recruits teacher and staff applicants obviously contributes to the types of people that are ultimately hired. Developing a racially diverse faculty and staff begins with this important and complicated process.

Create and use a set of explicit interview questions geared towards hiring culturally competent staff. Currently, all that is officially required for a prospective faculty member to be hired in FPS is a certification in teaching, and a passing score on a subject test in the discipline that they are applying to teach. Once they have passed this subject test, they never have to retake it unless the education commissioner decides the test has changed significantly enough for them to warrant retesting. (Indeed, 2019). A former applicant who went through the 2019 hiring process described applying to work in FPS as "Easy. Answer questions and describe your background." Another said there were "a lot of questions relating to parents, what would I do in situations, what...are my skills, do I know how to manage a calendar...teaching experience is a plus." (Indeed, 2019). These responses do not specify if they were asked about how to approach students that look different than them or how to understand their perspectives. FPS must develop an interview structure that assesses an applicant's ability to navigate the potential student backgrounds and perspectives that differ from their own. The National Association of Independent Schools offers valuable guidance on how to ask the right questions. (Cullinan, 2017)

Create a guide to recruit more diverse staff in accordance with state law SB 1022. On the state level, there exists infrastructure to work towards recruiting and hiring more BIPOC staff. A recently passed law, SB 1022 (PA 19-74), requires that school districts statewide "ensure local and regional boards of education in the state hire and employ at least 250 new minority teachers and administrators, of which at least 30% are men, each year beginning with the 2020-2021 school year." (Office of Legislative Research, 2019) We understand this means school districts are now competing for BIPOC teachers. In conversation with FPS administrators, we were glad to hear that our district is already in the process of creating a specific guide to recruit more diverse staff in accordance with this law. Surrounding towns have more detailed models which may be beneficial to reference (see Westport Minority Recruitment Plan, Norwalk Affirmative Action Plan, and Bridgeport Recruitment and Selection Process). Additionally, the Learning Policy Institute details suggestions for ways to attract and incentivize these teachers to come to FPS.

Add culturally competent pedagogy and/or racial equity in education certification/training as a preference in hiring. It should be noted that this training should not be a requirement, given that it may be cost-prohibitive to some applicants. To promote this knowledge base without being exclusionary, we recommend looking into RE-Center in Hartford, an organization which partners with school systems and offers general enrollment educational **equity** trainings and workshops to the public on a "pay what you can" basis. (Re-Center, 2019)

Recruit BIPOC educators from other institutions. We also recommend that FPS build relationships between districts and teacher preparation programs that enroll a diverse student body, such as alternative teacher preparation programs, which are more likely to serve BIPOC educators. (Motamedi).

Recruit BIPOC educators from our own schools. Finally, we recommend that FPS recruit future BIPOC educators by drawing from their own current students and non-academic staff. This may help to alleviate the hurdle of competition between school districts for new BIPOC hires, allowing us to recruit those who are already here instead of drawing in hires from elsewhere. For current BIPOC students with an expressed interest in education, a program could be made to connect them to scholarships or internships in education. As for current staff, there are a number of BIPOC staff already working within FPS as assistant sports coaches, paraprofessionals, librarians, and more, who would be great teachers but lack the funding for certifications. For them, a similar internship/scholarship program could be offered to incentivize the transition into teaching.

Hiring BIPOC Faculty and Staff

As of the start of this academic year, there are 22 openings for new hires within the district. See Appendix VIII for the list of positions.

Lessen focus on experience minimums, and increase focus on performance based tasks when evaluating applicants. It is important to note that just because these positions are available does not mean that they are directly accessible to BIPOC applicants. Experience minimums, while seemingly logical, often reify White workplace supremacy. We see this reflected in FPS' current hiring practices. This policy is forever inequitable when workplace discrimination still exists. (Anderson, 2020; Lopez, 2017; Nelson & Tyrell, 2015). As an alternative, we recommend using multiple measures—including performance-based tasks—to evaluate the qualifications of applicants (Boothroyd, 2008). Teachers' test scores, education, and experience are not always the best predictors of their performance in the classroom and may function as gatekeepers for BIPOC teachers (Motamedi). When hiring, to counteract unconscious and **implicit biases** which reduce the hiring of BIPOC, there are a number of potential strategies accessible (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2016). Find a full list of these hiring strategies in Appendix IX.

Retaining BIPOC Faculty and Staff

Despite the impact they have on students, many BIPOC educators often feel that they are not valued, finding frustration at being expected to take on extra duties (e.g. taking on the burden of educating students about racism simply because they are not White) without compensation or even the necessary support systems. As a result, BIPOC teachers leave the profession more often than White teachers do. (Vercelletto, 2018)

Once hired, staff are given a slew of resources, from healthcare benefits to technology support. There are only two existing resources that could help to retain BIPOC staff. Below are select measures that can be taken to improve BIPOC educator/staff retainment.

Expand upon the TEAM program to include Black ERGs and EAPs. The first program with potential to increase racial diversity in staff is the Teacher Education And Mentoring (TEAM) Program, passed in October 2009, (Fairfield Public Schools, 2020) which "provides support and professional development to beginning teachers". It is designed around five professional growth modules in order to provide a framework for support of new teachers, focused on the following domains of the Common Core of Teaching (CCT): classroom environment, planning, instruction, assessment and professional responsibility." This program has potential to serve as a support network for BIPOC staff, given that it provides a structure for mentorship and relationship building between teachers. However, at the moment, it focuses entirely on mentorship around how they run their classrooms. We recommend that FPS invests in Black employee resource groups (BERGs) (Bethea, 2020), which are shown to help attract and retain BIPOC applicants, and that FPS ensures that employee assistance programs (EAPs) exist which can provide affinity-based **racial trauma** support (e.g. by providing a roster of Black mental healthcare providers).

Expand upon the teacher mortgage assistance program by supporting affordable housing. The other program with potential is teacher mortgage assistance. This program expands eligibility for existing mortgage assistance program for certified teachers to include certified teachers who graduated from either an educational reform district (i.e. the 10 lowest performing districts in the state), a historically Black college or university (HBCU) or historically Hispanic-serving institutions (HSI), as defined in federal law. However, it should be noted that this program can only go so far without access to affordable housing within our town. Our Civic Engagement Committee is working with local and state politicians to try to improve conditions and increase the potential of this existing infrastructure. For more, see Future Directions.

Conclusion

The lack of diversity amongst educators in the FPS is profoundly troubling. In the past few years, there have been increased efforts by the BOE and FPS officials to hire educators from presently underrepresented backgrounds, but these efforts have yet to make any considerable shift in the significantly disproportionate staff-to-student racial demographics ratio in the district. If FPS is to become an equitable, equal, anti-racist district, it is an absolute precondition that present hiring policies must reinvented. FPS must create an explicit plan to recruit, hire and *retain* racially diverse, culturally competent school faculty and staff. To reiterate, FPS must actively seek out and incentivize culturally competent scholars of historically underrepresented backgrounds to join the FPS community.

> *Summary of Recommendations*:
> - *Create and use a set of explicit interview questions geared towards hiring culturally competent staff.*
> - *Create a guide to recruit more diverse staff in accordance with state law SB 1022.*
> - *Add culturally competent pedagogy and/or racial equity in education certification/training as a preference in hiring.*
> - *Recruit BIPOC educators from other institutions.*
> - *Recruit BIPOC educators from our own schools.*

- *Lessen focus on experience minimums, and increase focus on performance based tasks when evaluating applicants.*
- *Expand upon the TEAM program to include Black ERGs and EAPs.*
- *Expand upon the teacher mortgage assistance program by supporting affordable housing.*

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Actionable Change No. 5 - Redesign the pathways to success to meet the needs of all students and ensure that race, socioeconomic status, etc. will not predict any student's educational outcome.

Student Perspectives

"Didn't personally experience, but witnessed that my friend (a POC) felt stigmatized because of her race and felt like it was impossible to "improve" because the cards were already stacked against her." - on noticing or personal experience with racial discrimination in FPS' tracking methods and/or gifted programs.

"I was in both Gifted Language Arts and Math in elementary school. As far as I can remember, we were all White students. A similar pattern continued among the honors and AP tracks, where any "minority" students were largely Asian ("model minority"). These accelerated tracks largely seem like grooming White/Asian students for top/Ivy League colleges." - Class of 2015

"Students of color were not in higher tracks or AP programs, sans some White passing students of color" - Class of 2016

"My college prep level english class is nearly all students of color" - Class of 2022

"There were only White students in the gifted program in my year" - Class of 2015

"Very homogeneous racial makeup of upper level courses" - Class of 2011

"I think the texting that they do to place student son[sic] the gifted track is inherently biased. In elementary school, when testing begins, a major factor of a student's "intelligence" aka ability to score well, is their home life.. which varies, obviously, but in Fairfield I feel like the school's assumption is that everyone has a safe home with at least one parent available after school for hw help etc." - Class of 2016 on the racial or cultural bias in the non-gifted tracks.

"I think it needs to be addressing[sic] and analyzed. I cannot say much on this topic but I feel that implicit bias is definitely a factor whether it was intentional or not." - Class of 2014 on the racial or cultural bias in the non-gifted tracks.

"It is important that students of all backgrounds have the opportunity to take advanced courses. It is important for educators have an implicit bias against those of another race, placing students of other races in lower classes can have grave effects on their academic development and longterm success." - Class of 2009

Faculty and Staff Perspectives

"Our Math program is increasingly under pressure to allow parent selection in asking for the advance track for their children which is creating a clear racial divide in our programing [sic] at TMS for multiple reasons. We need to get rid of Math tracking at the Middle School level so we can employ the use of cooperative instruction and other equity teaching strategies which would benefit every child of every level of mathematics across the district. " - Seventh Grade teacher

"we need to ask questions about representation in such programs and then dissect why/how we measure who is eligible. What are the racial demographics of these classes? How do we measure "gifted"

"talented" "advanced?" What opportunities do kids have to show their unique intelligences? This is also so deeply connected to SPED. What opportunities are we creating for kids to understand themselves as learners and make choices about their learning? Who has historically had access to these classes and why?" - Third and Fourth Grade teacher

Introduction

Conventional measures of success are often constructed with harmful racial and socioeconomic consequences. In order to ensure that every student is assigned course levels commensurate with their abilities, FPS must adjust the ways in which students are identified and assessed for future course sequencing. The metrics through which teachers determine the academic track of a student should consider their ability under holistic review and with a de-emphasis on standardized testing. Determining eligibility for gifted and other fast-track programs, like every social construction, must mitigate biases that prevent students of different backgrounds and lived experiences access to the same advanced programs. Both standardized tests and subjective teacher evaluations present opportunities for implicit racial bias to obscure a BIPOC student's true ability and potential. FPS must rethink its metrics of success and who these metrics are defined in favor of in order to end the predictive value of social or cultural factors like race, class, and gender on student success.

Research

The Harm of Tracking Programs

From our correspondence with FPS counselors, it is understood that tracking in FPS begins in the 5th grade when students are given an assessment to determine their Math sequencing, the only leveled subject in middle school. This assessment is the primary determinant of a student's subsequent Math sequencing. 8th graders are then recommended for leveled high school courses in several classes including the English and Science subjects, in addition to the continued leveled Math courses. While there are no formal prerequisites to high school coursework, teacher recommendations are determined by a myriad of standardized assessments like the SBA and STAR Reading/Math tests. Teachers further consider work ethic, motivation, and the student's overall course grade.

Despite the seemingly positive intentions underlying the theory of tracking, many negative consequences have the potential to permanently offset a student's academic trajectory. First, tracking can significantly contribute to segregated classes and opportunity gaps (Collins et.al, 2019). As Actionable Change No. 6 explores, BIPOC students are disproportionately labeled as misbehaving based largely on cultural differences and **implicit biases** rather than actual misbehavior. As such, it follows logically that BIPOC students are disproportionately placed into 'lower' classes, since students that struggle academically or behaviorally are often assigned into such classes (Collins et.al, 2019). This is also true for English-language learners (ELL) and special education students, as both of these groups are often separated and placed on separate academic paths than non-ELL and non-special education students (Collins et.al, 2019). While many people believe these leveled courses are designed with the interests of all students in mind, by challenging high-achieving pupils and devoting more attention to those in need of help, these distinct paths are often unequal in terms of resources and the resulting quality of education.

Students in lower-track courses frequently have the fewest resources, least experienced teachers, and internalize negative feelings about their status as members of the "lower" course (Collins et.al, 2019).

Subjectivity in student tracking assessment presents an opportunity for implicit bias to influence student results. An abundance of research demonstrates the often unintentional shortcomings with tracking programs and the implicit biases that historically and presently marginalize BIPOC students and those of lower-income backgrounds from these programs (Young, 2020). Teachers are not exempt from the human tendency to develop "a learned set of beliefs about a specific race" that influence a teacher's attitude and relationship with their students of said race (Anderson, 2019). The effects of these racial biases extend negatively beyond mere prejudice. Researchers at the University of Auckland in New Zealand found that teachers who expect less from students of different races will lessen both the quality and quantity of learning opportunities for those students, which results in poorer educational outcomes (Meissel et.al, 2017). These biases, in turn, not only influence the present learning environment of a BIPOC student, but can affect educational outcomes on a long-term basis if the student is placed on an inappropriate course trajectory based on these preconceived notions (Meissel et.al, 2017).

Beyond the implicit biases that can place BIPOC students into ill-fitted courses, there is innate psychological harm in the process of labeling students as members of distinct academic groups with varying connotations. Labeling can create a sense of learned helplessness and low self-esteem (Kivi, 2010). Labeling practices, additionally, can lower expectations of the student from both parents and teachers, resulting in a diminished self-perception. This cyclical phenomenon further impairs a student's relationship to their peers. A student in the lower-track course is effectively "othered" from their classmates in higher courses and vice-versa; this physical separation contributes to a mental barrier amongst the students of different classes (Kivi, 2010). These perceptions of difference, in turn, predispose students to teasing and other bullying tactics. While labeling is practical in certain instances, for example, when disabled students and those with special needs require differentiated educational and emotional tools to succeed, the proper framework must exist so these distinctions between students are not connoted as harmful or negative (Kivi, 2010).

Limitations to Standardized Testing
Standardized testing is one prominent measure by which Fairfield students from an early age are distinguished from one another. FPS's use of the NNAT3 and CogAT in third grade classrooms is one of the first instances in which students are assessed for and then separated by ability (FPS, 2015) The Gifted Handbook for FPS notes that the NNAT3 test can be used to assess "socially or economically disadvantaged students...and those with disabilities that interfere with accurate measurement of ability" as well as students with "limited English proficiency." (FPS, 2015). Even when a certain test is designed to be objective and culturally sensitive, none are fully free of biases, whether they be racial, socio-economic, or cultural (Young, 2020). For example, biases arise when assumptions are made about background knowledge more commonly understood and experienced by White, middle-class students (Young, 2020). A widely-cited example of this bias was the use of the phrase "key to the city" in the former California High School Exit Exam, which confused many lower-income students unfamiliar with the phrase (Young, 2020). Being unfamiliar with the phrase "key to the city" is not an indicator of intelligence, but a measure of one's understanding of higher socioeconomic status culture. This example demonstrates one of the

major sources of bias standardized tests have: their partiality towards the cultural understandings largely held by White people. FEC strongly believes that to increase racial **equity** in our schools, any standardized test, even those that attempt to administer "fair assessments" across attributes like race and culture, should hold diminished importance in assessing the tracking of a student, in favor of a holistic review.

Evidence suggests that standardized tests remain influential measures in FPS. As the previous discussion on the district's gifted program reveals, the NNAT3 and CogAT tests are the primary tools by which to judge eligibility for these programs (FPS, 2015). The Standards-Based Assessment Overview for the district states the purposes of standardized tests as "compar[ing] student and district performance against the state and nation student performance" and "inform[ing] what individuals and groups of students achieved and provide responsive instruction" (FPS, 2015). The results of these assessments, furthermore, help determine "how students are progressing" and "adjust[ments to] instruction," while informing "educational decisions." (FPS, 2015) It is clear that standardized tests, while not used in isolation, play significant roles in assessing student achievement and planning future coursework within the district.

The Segregatory Effects of Gifted Programs
Gifted and talented programs similarly share an array of advantages and disadvantages. Students in gifted programs often have positive self-conceptions of their ability and academic situation (Loveless, 2016). Gifted students are generally segregated with other gifted students, allowing them to reach their academic potentials from positive peer interaction (Loveless, 2016). Likewise, gifted students receive the level of instruction appropriate to their ability through more flexible curricula that tailors to the specific child's learning style and ability. While the previous examples demonstrate the potential benefits of gifted programs, significant disadvantages exist for both gifted students and the student body at large. Gifted students often face undue expectations because of the social connotation with being "gifted" that may burden the mental and emotional health of these students (Loveless, 2016). Moreover, the subjectivity of identifying and distinguishing between gifted and non-identified students often has racial and socioeconomic consequences for several reasons (Loveless, 2016). Specifically, a teacher's implicit biases towards cultural differences can obscure a child's eligibility if the student's cultural differences are outside the accepted or understood markers of giftedness. These implicit biases result in otherwise deserving students losing access to the most appropriate coursework. Their exclusion further harms the school at large by perpetuating the skewed notion that Whiteness most closely aligns with giftedness. In sum, gifted programs tend to "otherize" students both in and out of gifted programs, often along harmful racial lines.

Students are chosen for the gifted program in FPS through various tests administered over the course of the "Identification Timeline" (FPS Gifted Handbook, 2015). The FPS Gifted Handbook notes that every third grader is assessed using the Naglieri (NNAT3) and CogAT tests and those that receive scores of 135 or higher on either test are automatically included in the gifted program (FPS Gifted Handbook, 2015). Students who scored between 124-134 on either test may be reviewed for consideration at the request of the teacher or guardian (FPS Gifted Handbook, 2015). The likelihood that a parent requests a review of their child, however, varies significantly based on socioeconomic status. Sociologist Annette Lareau notes that middle-class parents are heavily involved in their child's schooling and are more likely to have the

resources, knowledge, mindset, and connections to override teacher recommendations and decisions (Lureau, 2011). Lower-income parents, conversely, lack these privileges and are more likely to accept a school's assessment of their child as appropriate (Lureau, 2011). Importantly, these differences in parental involvement do *not* reflect a lack of interest in or care of their children; rather, they are the result of different understandings and expectations of how schools are supposed to work (Lureau, 2011, pp. 213). While requests for review theoretically allow any student to be assessed for gifted program eligibility; these requests are not made equally across the socioeconomic strata. Furthermore, because BIPOC students are more likely to be from lower-socioeconomic-statuses, requests for review discriminate both on socioeconomic and racial lines (American Psychological Association, 2017).

After a request for review has been made, "profile folders [of the student] are opened and...include work samples, standardized test results, grades, teacher and parent checklists, and other academic achievement data" (FPS Gifted Handbook, 2015). A "district team" then forms to review eligible students and make decisions before the end of the calendar year (FPS Gifted Handbook, 2015). While a wide range of material is reviewed for students under question, it is clear that the basis for determining gifted course eligibility is high scores on the NNAT3 and/or CogAT standardized tests if a guardian does not independently request a review of their child.

Racial Disparities in Advanced Placement Courses
The ultimate coursework for many students before graduating from FPS includes Advanced Placement (AP) classes offered through the College Board. FPS AP enrollment mirrors the research describing national racial disparities in advanced classes cited above.

As of the most recent available statistics from 2015, White students comprise 82.3% of the total number of students enrolled in at least one AP course in FPS while making up 79% of the total enrollment in the district. (DOE, 2015). While 2.2% of students enrolled in FPS identify as Black, only 1.3% of students enrolled in at least one AP course identify as Black. (DOE, 2015). Similarly, 9.3% of all students identify as Hispanic, but only 5.6% of Hispanic students are enrolled in at least one AP course (DOE, 2015). Students who identify as Asian are the only other racial demographic group other than White students with higher percentages in the population of students taking at least one AP course (7.8%) than total enrollment (5.7%) (DOE, 2015). Based on the data collected in our first student survey, 65% of White students are in AP classes while 59% of Black students are in AP classes. FPS should strive to lessen these racial disparities in AP coursework by working to ensure that the demographics of AP enrollment correspond to the district's overall student demographic proportion.

Implementation

Tracking systems like the one employed by FPS are difficult to change for the simple reason that education in the United States has centered around this methodology for a considerable time; these processes and their underlying logic are deeply entrenched in traditional understanding of educational practice. FEC does not object to the ultimate need to distinguish student ability to a certain degree, but the way in which students are assessed and subsequently tracked needs to be fair and equitable across racial, cultural, and socioeconomic lines.

FEC also understands there are logistical and institutional barriers to de-emphasizing standardized tests that extend beyond FPS's immediate control. On both the national and state levels, standardized testing is used as a benchmark indicator to determine the relative performance of a school and/or district with other districts across the state and country (Strauss, 2015). Standardized test scores, additionally, allow for easy and efficient comparisons of student achievement. The prevailing sense of a standardized test's "objectivity" keeps this method popular among state and local governments, despite the well-documented biases in these tests that suggest otherwise. If standardized tests must be kept for legal or funding purposes, FEC recommends de-emphasizing their importance as significantly as possible (see below).

There are several important and actionable steps that can be taken to ensure that tracking measures accurately assess students' appropriate academic sequencing across racial, cultural, and socioeconomic lines, beyond the implicit bias teacher training outlined in Actionable Change No. 2.

Reimagine student preparedness and expectations of success. How students are encouraged in the classroom significantly influences their attitudes to learning and subsequent academic performance. Students of all abilities would further benefit from restructuring the ways in which they are assessed and grouped from a young age.

> *Develop the growth mindset in all students.* Originally coined by Carol Dweck at Stanford University, the **growth mindset** describes the mentality that intelligence is not a static condition and can be developed and improved upon by *any* student with practice (Claro et.al, 2016). Unlike a fixed mindset, which views intelligence as unchangeable, a growth mindset is a strong predictor of academic success. A Stanford University study found that a growth mindset has a strong positive relationship to academic achievement across every socioeconomic stratum, acting as a "buffer" to the damaging effects of poverty on educational outcomes (Claro et.al, 2016). Teachers must actively develop the growth mindset in all of their students so each pupil understands that their baseline learning ability can improve over time. Cultivating this mindset will motivate students to expand their knowledge out of a genuine desire to learn more and not merely for the sake of their test scores and assessment outcomes. A growth mindset should be promoted in all students, with emphasis on students who face institutional barriers to success, like BIPOC students.

> *Incorporate the benefits and structuring of gifted and talented programming into all elementary school classes.* Repeated studies suggest that segregating students identified as gifted from the general student body is not only ineffective in a pure academic sense but creates harmful psychological and developmental effects for both groups of students (Potter & Burris, 2019). Similar to the previous discussion about leveled courses generally, gifted programs "otherize" students from one another (Potter & Burris, 2019). Integrating these separate classrooms will help to remedy these harmful segregating effects. FEC calls for the dissolution of the gifted program in favor of restructuring all elementary coursework to include the gifted program provisions. The benefits that gifted programs provide students, like better resources, tailored instruction, and collaborative environments, can and would be enjoyed by all students irrespective of ability.

Current elementary curriculum across grades should be reimagined, guided in part by the recommendations outlined in Actionable Change No. 1, to mirror current gifted program components, like the "social and emotional development" that FPS concedes is "not always accessible in a regular education classroom" (FPS Gifted Handbook, 2015). Emphasizing social and emotional development through collaborative environments in the academic setting must be democratized to all students. If each student is exposed to this type of classroom structuring, achievement gaps would likely lessen and potential segregatory effects in the gifted selection process would be altogether avoided.

Remove math tracking from 5th to 8th grade. FPS ended tiered classes in all middle school subjects several years ago, except in the Math curriculum. We recommend additionally removing tiered instruction for Math at the middle school level for the same important reasons discussed above, namely to prevent the harmful psychological effects of segregated coursework in favor of the many benefits of mixed-ability classrooms.

Create open enrollment in all high school subjects. Creating open enrollment for all high schoolers is the logical measure that follows from developing the growth mindset in students. If students are taught that each of them has the potential to succeed, they should be allowed to enroll in the courses they desire without formal or informal barriers. Under an open enrollment program, students should be well-informed about the totality of their future course options. We recommend that explicit and detailed guides to each class are written and distributed to each student and their parents or caregivers during the course selection process. These guides should include curriculum overviews and objectives, workload expectations, evaluative measures used, etc. To ensure that students seeking to move to higher-level courses are supported in their decisions, high schools should develop an optional, free tutoring program offered during the academic year. The program could operate throughout the day in different time blocks, like during activity periods, free periods, and after-school, so students have a range of options from which to choose.

Open enrollment should not only allow proactive high schoolers the ability to select their desired course level, but should actively recruit and encourage students who may otherwise not enroll in the appropriate course. While FEC understands that there are no formal barriers to course enrollment, informal barriers like misunderstanding course expectations, student insecurity, and teacher recommendations often influence the types of students that enter higher-level classes. Teachers and counselors should actively recruit and encourage all students to enroll in courses that challenge them appropriately. Students who are underrepresented in the district's AP enrollment, like Black and Latinx students, should be encouraged to enroll -- and then supported -- in higher-level courses. To be clear, FEC does not propose putting students into higher-level courses simply for the sake of doing so; however, inclusive recruitment of all students will allow high schoolers who would otherwise remain stagnant in their sequencing, for any number of reasons, to fulfill their true academic potentials.

We further recommend that teacher recommendations for future coursework become optional components in the course selection process given only at the behest of the student and/or the

guardian. As previously discussed, teacher bias in course recommendations may lead to a student's inappropriate course assignment. A 2011 study published in the *American Educational Research Journal* found that "teachers in lower-socioeconomic-status and lower-achieving contexts more often underestimate their students' abilities." (Ready et.al, 2011). The course selection process should be driven primarily by the interests articulated by the student themself, with encouragement and clarification from their teacher and counselor when requested. Teacher input given upon request will more likely be considered as one factor of many, whereas automatic teacher recommendations are often treated as the determinative factor in a child's course selection. **Affinity-based counseling**, where the counselor and student share a common identity, should be utilized to inform a student's decision. For more information on affinity-based counseling, see Actionable Change No. 6.

Change the ways in which student progress is measured. Conventional measures of student progress and academic achievement are pigeoned into restrictive and incomplete numerical or letter-grade systems. Supplementing these forms with other methods of evaluating student progress will afford each student a better understanding of their own work and future potential, empowering them to take charge of their academic trajectory.

> *Require narrative evaluations of student progress with each report card*. Numerical and letter grades have not only been shown to inadequately reflect a student's performance and future potential, but warps student motivation to learn. Quantitative grading decreases student engagement in the course material, encourages tasks to be completed in the easiest and most superficial manner, and generally reduces the quality of students' critical thinking. (Harper, 2019). Narrative evaluations can correct these harmful effects by re-engaging the student in the evaluation of their learning processes. These narratives should focus on elements beyond the numerical grade for the term; for example, teachers should include descriptions of a student's engagement, their learning styles, how they interact with fellow students, and suggestions for harnessing future academic potential. Explicit guidelines for these narrative reports must be developed with community and teacher input to ensure each evaluation is thorough and informative to the student. Additionally, FPS should provide professional development surrounding these evaluations so teachers feel best-equipped to evaluate in this form. FEC appreciates the potential increase in teacher workload that would come with requiring narrative evaluations. While this concern rightly derives from the already large responsibility teachers hold, we strongly feel the benefits of narrative evaluations far outweigh the logistical burden. Importantly, regular narrative evaluations can replace teacher recommendations for future courses, give students detailed points of reflection, and provide crucial insight into academic potential.

> *Remove weighted GPA*. Proponents of weighted GPA argue that students in higher-level courses are subjected to more rigorous coursework and subsequently deserve a weighted GPA to mitigate expected decreases in a student's average (for example, an A- in English 10H is equivalent to a B+ in English 10). This reasoning, however, fails to consider the underlying assumption of tiered systems: that students are placed in course levels which correspond to their abilities. To use the

preceding example, a student who truly belongs in English 10H will theoretically be equally challenged as the student who is appropriately assigned to English 10. GPAs should not give preferential weight to honors or AP courses since tiered courses presuppose each student is appropriately challenged in whichever course they take. Many universities already convert applicants' GPAs to the non-weighted standard 4.0-scale, making these distinctions unimportant (Jaschik, 2017). Weighted GPAs, moreover, incentive students to enroll in higher-level courses specifically for the GPA boost, which often backfires and results in even lower averages (Jaschik, 2017). FEC appreciates that standardizing GPA calculation may be met with resistance and be complicated by the college admission process, yet we believe this is an important long-term goal for FPS to achieve.

De-emphasize the importance of standardized testing. There is growing consensus in academia that "teaching to the test," where teachers center their curriculum (often for AP classes) largely around preparing students to do well on standardized tests, misrepresents a student's true understanding of the material and devalues the actual importance of education (Popham, 2001). Students in this type of learning environment tend to prioritize doing well on the test instead of engaging with the material honestly and thoroughly with genuine interest (Popham, 2001). All teachers in FPS should refocus their instruction around the process and joy of learning itself, with less emphasis on doing well on the AP exam or other standardized assessments. Restructuring lesson plans beyond rote memorization, for example, can encourage creative and critical thinking and allow students to articulate overarching themes and concepts to understand the big picture (Louisiana State University, 2016). For more strategies on de-emphasizing standardized testing, see Appendix X.

Cultivate student agency. Similarly to developing a growth mindset, cultivating student agency means equipping students with the mindset and tools to take responsibility over their own education. (Poon, 2018). Rather than deferring to teachers and counselors for answers, students with strong agency actively seek these answers out themselves. Students with agency proactively set their own goals and see to it that they are achieved. Developing student agency will enhance educational outcomes and prepare students and their families to make appropriate, well-informed decisions about future coursework and academic goals (Poon, 2018). This mindset is the foundation on which the ultimate academic and interpersonal success of a student is built. Empowered to seek out answers and advocate for themselves, students with agency are primed to succeed during and well after their time in FPS. This mindset is not automatic for most students and must be actively developed; tips for doing so can be found in Appendix XI.

Conclusion

The ways in which student success and ability are measured must be reimagined so children of all identities and backgrounds have equal chance of success. Research suggests that the conventional ways of measuring student success and course sequencing are often biased towards White, middle class conventional learners. We must reinvent the ways in which students are assessed, abandoning rigid, formulaic assessment for open-ended, collaborative, and contextualized learning in mixed-ability classrooms. Broadening assessment techniques to include narrative evaluations will not only lead to a

more accurate understanding of a student's learning style and comprehension, but better assist them in improving their skillsets. The reforms outlined in this section, taken holistically, are meant to empower students and inspire a love of learning for the sake of learning itself, and not for the mere conventional "success" quantified by a number or percentile.

> ***Summary of Recommendations*:**
> - *Reimagine student preparedness and expectations of success.*
>   - *Develop the growth mindset in all students.*
>   - *Incorporate the benefits and structuring of gifted and talented programming into all elementary school classes.*
>   - *Remove math tracking from 5th to 8th grade.*
>   - *Create open enrollment in all high school subjects.*
> - *Change the ways in which student progress is measured.*
>   - *Require narrative evaluations of student progress with each report card.*
>   - *Remove weighted GPA.*
>   - *De-emphasize the importance of standardized testing.*
>   - *Cultivate student agency*

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Actionable Change No. 6 - Reimagine discipline systems by shifting toward restorative practices and invest in resources that will support and empower all students.

Student Perspectives

"the discipline systems are awful and they almost never help solve the problem. They literally will not do anything if someone reports something anonymously even if it's pretty serious." - Class of

2023 on their personal or witnessed experience with racial discrimination in regards to how the discipline systems are used within FPS.

"I noticed that the safety officers would often target students of color or "follow them around" more than White students on average" - on their personal or witnessed experience with racial discrimination in regards to how the discipline systems are used within FPS.

"black students are much more often targeted by deans and teachers and given stricter punishments. Students are penalized for coming in late, not having certain materials, etc" - Class of 2023 on their personal or witnessed experience with racial discrimination in regards to how the discipline systems are used within FPS.

"Black students facing more detentions. Instead of educators trying to understand or give black students the benefit of the doubt, educators more quickly choose to punish." - Class of 2009 on their personal or witnessed experience with racial discrimination in regards to how the discipline systems are used within FPS.

"I've definitely noticed students of color be punished; sent to the principal's office, received ISS, etc more often and for things that White students received no punishment for." - Class of 2016 on their personal or witnessed experience with racial discrimination in regards to how the discipline systems are used within FPS.

"In middle school and [sic] White girl verbally and physically assaulted a black girl and the black girl fought back. The black girl was suspended for multiple days and the White girl had no disciplinary action taken on her. The White girl skipped school for a few days out of embarrassment while the black girl wasn't allowed to be in school for a few days due to the fight." - Class of 2016 on their personal or witnessed experience with racial discrimination in regards to how the discipline systems are used within FPS.

"Brushed away in the moment, i believe action was taken afterward" - Class of 2015 on how situations of racial discrimination was handles by other peers, administrators, or teachers.

"Most people in FPS are ignorant and blind to these issues" - Class of 2016 on how situations of racial discrimination was handles by other peers, administrators, or teachers.

"I think that teachers need to undergo training and there needs to be "harsher" discipline and education for those who make insensitive remarks." - Class of 2021 on how the discipline systems can be improved.

"I would push for trauma-informed practices as well as restorative practices. Social emotional learning from an equity lens should also be infused into every aspect of our education system"

"Why is suspension a disciplinary action? not everyone has the privilege to stay home with a guardian and have a meal that day and the more POCs get suspended due to an unjust system the more school they miss and the more behind they get and then they are placed into the tracking system and don't get placed in honors classes and possibly don't have the grades or support they need after their FPS education. The school system can not only do emotional damage but can have serious consequences on a persons[sic] future." - Class of 2016 on how the discipline systems can be improved.

"A mentorship system should be in place. Instead of reverting to punishment, administrators should take all students under their wings to address behavioral issues. They should be equipped with

strategies that restore justice." - Class of 2009 on how the discipline systems can be improved.

"I generally think discipline in school should be much more focused on mental health and providing resources for students, as opposed to taking them out of class, yelling etc." - Class of 2016 on how the discipline systems can be improved.

Faculty and Staff Perspectives

"In general, all students need better discipline systems. Restorative practices are much more healing and do more to improve overall school climate and likely by direct consequence, attendance, Grades and more." - Sixth-Twelfth Grade teacher on the effects of the current disciplinary policies on students.

"I do not believe that suspensions and expulsions are effective forms of discipline. I think it only reinforces a negative self-narrative and does not address the root of the issues that let the students there. Evidence-based practices that have been show to help with school behavior should be the basis of disciplinary policies." - Third-Fifth Grade teacher on the effects of the current disciplinary policies on students.

"Punitive disciplinary policies have an adverse effect on minority students. There are too many assumptions made at the beginning of the behaviors. Students of color are disciplined in higher numbers than their white majority counterparts. Some of this due to that the white students are given the benefit of the doubt more often, even though they are engaging in the same behaviors. They are given more "warnings" prior to the disciplinary action. The policy has to implemented the same across the board for all, otherwise it doesn't work. Also ISS, OSS, expulsion do nothing to fix the problem behaviors." - Ninth-Twelfth Grade teacher On the effects of the current disciplinary policies on the students.

"I don't think it addresses the root of the problem. Much like prison doesn't solve crime, we would be more suited to hire more counselors and social workers to help these students get to the root of their behavior issues." - Elementary School teacher on the effects of the current disciplinary policies on students.

"When you facilitate a "human obedience training" facility disguised as an educational institution, these policies are essential to run a "tight ship." Suspensions and expulsions do the exact opposite of what they're supposedly trying to remedy - when a kid struggles in math, we help them with their math skills; when a kid struggles with writing, we give them models and linguistic strategies; when a kid "misbehaves" (and, by the way, this is a term that probably needs a bit more unpacking in and of itself--what "behaving" looks like for some is docility for others), we punish them. Makes no sense."

"Does not connect with what students need help with: connecting with and being part of a community without feeling judged or needing to change themselves to fit in." - Ninth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Grade teacher on the effects of the current disciplinary policies on students.


Introduction

FPS must remedy the practices that lead to disproportionate discipline of BIPOC students and invest in practices that will foster a positive climate for all students. As such, FEC calls for FPS to move away from exclusionary discipline practices -- defined as any type of punishment in which the offender is

removed from his or her typical academic setting. This punishment most commonly ends in suspensions and expulsions (National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline). The goal is to replace these programs with **restorative justice** measures, defined as a holistic approach to discipline that relies on bringing all parties impacted by an issue or behavior together to repair harm, reduce risk, and build community (González, 2012). We also recommend embedding **social-emotional learning** (SEL) within our schools. SEL is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, and establish and maintain positive relationships (Resilience, Inc. 2020). We also call for FPS to invest in **affinity-based counseling** for students, wherein students and counselors share a common background or identity.

Research

Disciplinary Policies

The evidence against exclusionary policies is strong, highlighting its negative implications on racial disparities, school climate, academic achievement, and future recidivism. In 2019, the average school in the U.S. suspended Black students at a rate significantly higher than their peers, with 27% percent of schools in Connecticut disciplining Black students at a higher rate than White students (Harper, Ryberg & Tempkin, 2019). Significant research discounts the theory that these racial disparities are based on actual behavioral differences that warrant punishment (Jacobson, 2018;Eitle, 2004); these discrepancies, in reality, result from a subjective construct of the "ideal student" that often aligns with White or higher socioeconomic status students' behavior. Following this logic, research suggests that White students are more likely to be disciplined for provable, documented offenses (e.g. smoking, vandalism), while Black students are more likely to be disciplined for subjective offenses, like charges of "disrespect" (USDOE Office of Civil Rights, 2014). Additionally, Black children ages 6 to 21 are already 40 percent more likely to be identified with disabilities than their peers (Harper, 2020). Practitioners' biases contribute to these decisions, which can also lead to disproportionate misdiagnoses of mental illness.
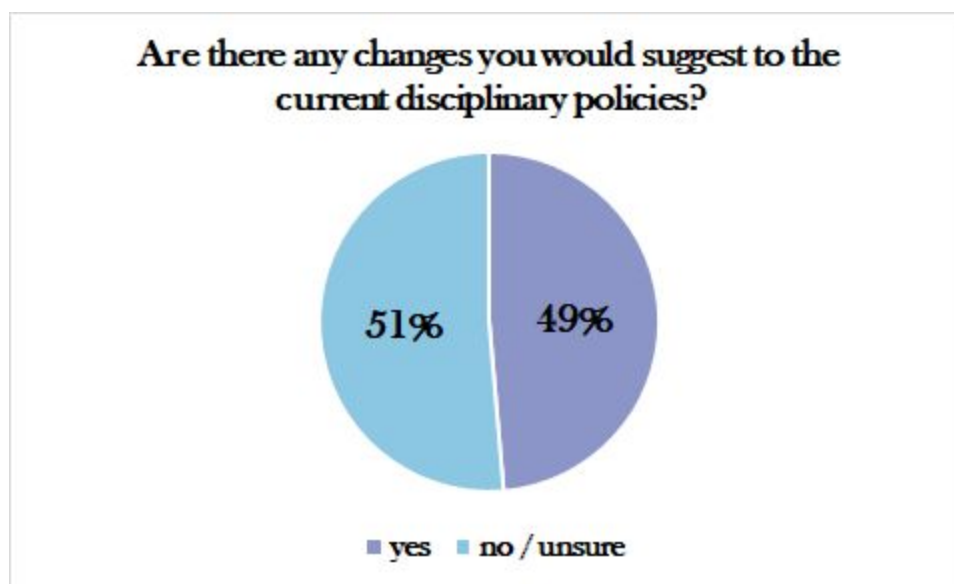
A majority of respondents (51%) to our teacher and staff survey thought current disciplinary practices should be amended.

In addition to the racial disparities from exclusionary discipline practices, this approach exacerbates the opportunity gap between White students and BIPOC students (Morris & Perry, 2016). Exclusionary policies not only fail to improve academic achievement, but also inhibit academic growth for suspended students, and, with significantly differing rates among races, have negative implications for perpetuating inequality. Research further suggests that exclusionary policies fail to improve school climate and do not reduce the likelihood of future misbehavior (González, 2015). Placing officers on school grounds only exacerbates the problem, as students are too often funneled into the criminal justice system for offenses as minor as doodling on a desk (Chen, 2020). School-based arrests are often for these low-level behavior infractions, like disorderly conduct, that criminalize normal student behavior and push students out of school. Moreover, there is no data that support that police in schools improve student safety, student educational outcomes, or student mental health (ACLU, 2019). As such, the consequences of exclusionary policies reach significantly beyond the bounds of the education system and contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, the national crisis of pulling at-risk youth out of school and entangling them in the juvenile justice system (Wald & Losen).

Connecticut Public Schools mirrors this racially disparate and inequitable national trend. In the 2017-2018 year, Connecticut Public Schools suspended 14.3% of Black and African American students, compared to just 4.2% of White students (Wentzell, 2019). While these rates are declining, they lessen by no greater than 1 percent each school year (Wentzell, 2019). In Fairfield specifically, public schools suspend Black students at a rate almost five times higher than that of White students, and suspend Hispanic and Latinx students at a rate more than twice as high as that of White students (Edsight, 2019). Moreover, in Fairfield's 2019 School Climate Survey, 43.51% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "Adults at my [secondary] school apply the same rules to all students equally." It is imperative that FPS eliminate out-of-school suspension and expulsion from their disciplinary practices, and implement inclusive, restorative discipline rather than exclusive, punitive discipline.

Restorative Justice

The ineffectiveness of exclusionary discipline is likely a function of how suspensions reinforce negative behavior, deny students the opportunity for "positive socialization," and create feelings of distrust for adults and the school community (Buccanfuso & Kufeld, 2011). When we use expulsion or suspension as punishment for a student's poor behavior, we implicitly inform the student that they do not belong, that they are wrong, and that they are undeserving of the same education as their peers. In reality, this poor behavior is likely prompted by factors in the student's life outside of school, which is why they are better served counseled and listened to rather than removed from the educational environment to be punished.

Restorative justice approaches discipline through engaging all members involved in a certain incident to communicate about the issue and potential solutions, rather than removing offenders from the conversation. Restorative practices represent a philosophy that recognizes the importance of prioritizing the relationships and connections among all people within a school community and provides a framework for creating a positive school climate and culture. The process involves school-based social-emotional learning (SEL) programs that reinforce good behavior in the classroom and involve behavioral

interventions and support for students who misbehave. It is important to note that implementation of restorative justice does not mean the complete, instant elimination of exclusionary discipline. In many cases, restorative justice implementation provides a mere alternative to suspensions and expulsions, and its implementation acts to decrease the frequency of exclusionary discipline substantially, though oftentimes not completely (Augustine et.al, 2018). Certain restorative justice programs still involve suspensions for students who directly and severely violate district or school policy, though these programs nevertheless implement restorative practices when the student is reintegrated into the school community (Augustine et.al 2017).

There are many different models of restorative justice, including circle conferences in which a trained administrator leads a group discussion between the harmed student, offender, families, teachers, and other involved parties (González, 2015). Accounts of restorative justice practices are often successful, like when a 14-year-old named Tommy got in a yelling match with his teacher because he refused to lift his head up off his desk; after a restorative justice circle, Tommy explained that what the teacher interpreted as disobedience was a result of Tommy's sleepless nights and stress of taking care of his siblings full-time after his mother relapsed. Fortunately, after each party voiced their perspective, Tommy's mother rededicated herself to treatment, Tommy's grades and behavior permanently improved, and Tommy's teacher who had previously considered quitting, remained at school for years to come. Had the school chosen a punitive approach, Tommy would have been sent directly back into the situation causing and contributing to his distress (Davis, 2014). It is pivotal that school administrations shift the paradigm to developing character and creating a positive school climate rather than a reactive response.

While research in favor of restorative justice is in its early phases, studies support the notion that restorative justice decreases racial disparities in punishment (Augustine et.al, 2018), decreases disciplinary referrals of Latinx and Black students, improves teachers' relationships with BIPOC students, and improves school climate, academic performance, and attendance (Gregory, 2004). Restorative justice also supports student brain development with decision-making skills, social-emotional intelligence, and impulse control (Wolpert-Gawron, 2016). Contrasting the isolating effects of exclusionary policies, restorative practices increase students' desire to belong, lessen feelings of marginalization, and improve relationships with peers and teachers (McCluskey et.al, 2008). While the initial research appears promising, there is a general lack of research surrounding restorative justice that utilizes experimental methods, limiting the generalizability of the many studies that suggest positive outcomes (Augustine et.al, 2018). The methods of implementation of restorative justice, moreover, significantly influence results. For example, in Philadelphia, implementation success was moderated by the school's ability and willingness to implement the reform (Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017). As such, it is crucial that FPS implement proper restorative policies to ensure long-lasting success.

Mental Health
It is imperative that FPS help students work out differences, think beyond emotional impulses, and prioritize students' mental health and stress management. Accordingly, it is necessary to incorporate affinity-based mental health services in schools not only because of a national shortage of school psychologists, but, perhaps more importantly, mental health issues disproportionately affect Black and

Latinx people, who additionally face race-based mental health issues such as **racial trauma** and **racial battle fatigue**.

In Fairfield's 2019 School Climate Survey, only 36.43% of respondents answered "yes" to the statement, "While at school, I have been taught ways to manage stress," with 21.13% of students answered "not sure." Both restorative justice practices and affinity-based counseling will help students learn how to cope with their emotions in a productive way, focusing on how to prevent and cope with difficulties in and outside of school. This survey failed to ask questions specifically about mental health, so other metrics regarding success of mental health programs is unclear at the time. In the 2014-2015 year, Connecticut had an average student-counselor ratio of 466:1, significantly higher than the American School Counselor Association's recommended ratio of 250:1 (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2015; American School Counselor Association, 2020). Notably, Fairfield has a better student-counselor ratio than the state average, with elementary, middle, and high schools at ratios of 264:1, 139:1, and 93:1, respectively (Edsight, 2019). While information of the racial demographics of FPS counselors and support staff are not readily available, the understanding that 96.7% of all staff in the district is White highlights the current inability to implement affinity-based counseling without hiring additional professionals (Jones, 2019). As such, in order to implement an affinity-based mental health program, FPS must hire additional BIPOC counselors to adequately represent all students.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)
Social-emotional learning (SEL) should be embedded into the fabric of FPS from Pre-K-12th grade. SEL is defined as the process through which students can develop pro-social behaviors like empathy, set and achieve positive goals, develop an awareness of self and others, establish and maintain healthy relationships, engage in responsible decision making, and recognize and understand emotions (CASEL, 2020). SEL programming can increase academic achievement and improve behavior through coordination among educators, students, and community agencies (Weissberg, 2016). There are statistically significant associations between measured social-emotional skills in Kindergarten and young adult outcomes across multiple domains of education, employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health (*American Journal for Public Health; CITE 1).* Research on SEL programming and the short-term and long-term effects can be found in Appendix XII (*continue onto next page*).

Implementation
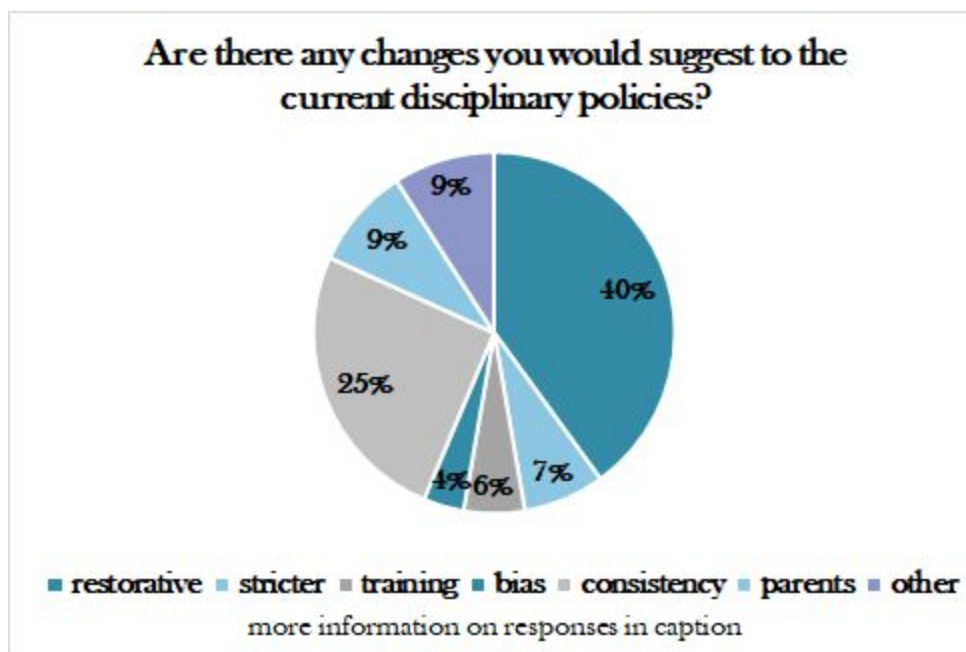
*The above graphic depicts the desired changes to disciplinary policies expressed by the respondents to our teacher and staff survey. **Restorative**: teachers recommended the implementation of restorative justice practices with respect to disciplinary policies. **Stricter**: teachers recommended stricter disciplinary policies. **Training**: Teachers requested more training on how to enact disciplinary policies. **Bias**: Teachers noted the need to ensure that bias does not play a role in how discipline is given. **Consistency**: Teachers noted the need to ensure consistency in how discipline is given across grade levels, subjects, staff vs. teachers, etc. **Parents**: Teachers noted the need to either make some parents more involved in the process, or the need to resist parent pressure with respect to how discipline is given. **Other**: reason other than those listed here.*

Restorative Justice

Integrate restorative justice at the classroom, school, and community level. Implementation of restorative justice requires a three-pronged approach involving classrooms, schools, and home communities. Within the classroom, implementation involves curriculum (see Actionable Change No. 1) as well as instruction (see Actionable Change No. 2). More broadly, in schools, implementation involves a revision of schoolwide practices and policies to shift away from the current definitions of discipline and toward inclusive, rehabilitative environments. This shift will require the eventual hiring of a restorative justice coordinator to reimagine FPS's understanding of punishment and begin implementing restorative justice policies like meditation circles and victim-offender conversations. For the last prong of implementation, it is important that social-emotional learning extends into the home and community as well. This can be accomplished by inviting family and community members to participate in mediation circles, encouraging family and community members to join restorative justice training, and maintaining transparency on disciplinary policies within our schools.

Get counsel from professional speakers and initiative guides. While the exact implementation of these policies will come after future discussions with Fairfield administrators, some resources to help

implement restorative justice can be found in Appendix XIII. These guidelines will help FEC and FPS develop a thorough and focused restorative justice model.

Incorporate restorative justice into the District Improvement Plan. Currently, Fairfield Warde High School is planning for a Restorative ISS Program with the mission to "...provide a safe and structured environment where students can repair their relationships and strengthen their connection to the school community…" (FWHS, 2020). This program will incorporate social-emotional learning and self-reflection with the goal of facilitating academic and personal growth. In discussion with Superintendent Cummings, we were grateful to hear of his interest in including the contents of this report at large in the District Improvement plan. Specifically, we call for the district to enact restorative justice into the District Improvement Plan, incorporating Warde's program as an example to other FPS schools' practices, while expanding the reach of all the schools' programs to encompass out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, as well.

Affinity-based Mental Health
Hire more BIPOC counselors and create racial caucus safe spaces. Additionally, a starting point for implementing affinity-groups is Racial Equity Tools' resources for racial caucus and affinity groups. It is imperative that counselors and psychologists who are **BIPOC** are hired at higher rates (see Actionable Change No. 3) to give BIPOC students the opportunity to speak with professionals who understand and empathize with their experiences. Navigating the complexities of race is an extremely difficult task in therapy, and one that has the potential to open deep wounds. Erica Woodland, founder of the National Queer & Trans Therapists of Color Network, writes "To not have a deep understanding of White supremacy... and then to be doing clinical work and not understanding how that plays out [in therapy] is really damaging" (Babu, 2017) It would also be beneficial to incorporate **racial caucusing** as an optional program in the counseling centers to give BIPOC students safe spaces to discuss their experiences and feelings with peers and a moderator.

From our conversations with current counselors, FEC understands that counselor positions have little turnover and are kept for long durations of time. While we still strongly believe in the importance of hiring more BIPOC counselors, all current counselors must be thoroughly trained in anti-racism and other cultural competency practices specific to the counseling role. See Actionable Change No. 2 for guidance.

Conduct audits of FPS' existing mental health and counseling programs. We also call for Fairfield to follow the lead of Stamford and Enfield Public Schools by having the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI) conduct an audit of FPS' mental health programs and then work within the district to implement recommendations to develop an intensive, trauma-informed program involving mental health practices. Moreover, through utilizing the free, public-access School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation (SHAPE) system, FPS can analyze mental health systems and track improvement over time to support the improvement of school mental health.

Social-Emotional Learning
Train staff in Social and Emotional Learning. In addition to increasing the number of mental health staff in the FPS, it is imperative for there to be ongoing training for the counseling staff that cover but are not

limited to the following: social-emotional learning; affinity-based counseling; culturally affirming social-emotional learning, student identities, etc. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act is beginning to encourage school districts to prioritize social-emotional learning. Human development and behavioral neuroscience have demonstrated that learning is social, emotional, and academic. You cannot have one without the other.

That being said, SEL practices are generally based in White, cisgender, heteronormative, and patriarchal norms and beliefs that further perpetuate psychological and emotional harm and trauma to BIPOC and other marginalized communities (Simmons, 2018) It is clear that SEL improves learning and life skills, so it is important that we shift the foundation of SEL so that it is grounded in acknowledging the identity and culture of each student. Students who have experienced trauma or who undergo chronic stress from existing in a school where they are one of very few BIPOC students are unable to learn as well as their peers who are not suffering from trauma and chronic stress.

The Council of Distinguished Scientists housed under the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, drew from brain science, medicine, economics, psychology, and education research to call all schools to integrate social-emotional learning into all aspects of the school environment (Jones & Khan, 2017). Interventions created to improve SEL have proven to be effective for all children regardless of geographical setting or socio-demographic background. Because we know that students who undergo adversity and trauma are more likely to experience difficulties in school, it is important to buffer their exposure to adversity in schools. This can only be accomplished by examining SEL from a non-**White-washed** perspective: "A trauma-informed, SEL, cultural awareness model of supports allows (educators) to create a safe environment to address trauma and SEL skill build, while also tapping into the strengths and opportunities of students' culture. In this way, prevention assets don't just build on each other, they multiply," says Dr. Gregory Leskin, Ph.D, Director at UCLA/Duke University National Center for Child Traumatic Stress (Berlinski, 2018; Simmons, Brackett & Adler, 2019).

Acknowledge and work around racial and socio-economic barriers to equity in SEL implementation. Research from The Pennsylvania State University demonstrated that SEL must be grounded in a larger context of **equity** and justice efforts in order for it to be effective for *all* students. The five barriers that lead to ineffective SEL practices include: poverty; exclusionary discipline practices and policies in schools; lack of trauma-informed practices in school; **implicit bias** in school staff; and educator stress and burnout. Several mitigations efforts to avoid these barriers include: school racial and socioeconomic integration initiatives; restorative justice practices for school discipline; trauma-informed system interventions; **culturally competent** and equity-literate educators; and SEL and mindfulness programming to support students and staff (Simmons, Brackett & Adler, 2019). One example of an evidence-based, learner-directed, trauma-informed program that improves SEL, resiliency, and cultural identity development which FPS could use is Ripple Effects (Ripple Effects). It works in conjunction with Connecticut's Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), in that it provides tiered intervention for Tiers 1-3. This way, it can be easily implemented into the FPS.

Educate staff on racial and cultural impact on students' social-emotional health and learning style. FPS owes its students social-emotional learning and an education that is rooted in sociopolitical context. If

students are uncomfortable in their learning environment, they are not going to learn. Staff and faculty must appreciate the historical and present structural racism that can influence the learning outcomes of BIPOC students and how these factors affect their social-emotional health. Staff must be trained to recognize the cultural learning tools that students bring to the classroom (i.e., oral storytelling), and not automatically assume a student is off-task or not interested in learning the way the teacher is attempting to teach. Staff then need to give these students permission to use those skills in all contexts (Hammond & Jackson, 2015).

Dena Simmons, Assistant Director at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and leader in RULER (an evidence-based SEL program that teaches the five skills of emotional intelligence to help people of all ages to use their emotions wisely), suggests the following for teaching SEL from an equity-based and non-White-washed lens: (1) provide students opportunities to reflect on identity and equity to build self-awareness; (2) enhance relationship skills through debate; (3) develop responsible decision-making skills through community-based projects; (4) use current topics to foster social awareness; and (5) explore different expectations for self-management (Simmons, 2019). SEL skills can help all students and staff build and improve communities that facilitate courageous conversations across cultures so everyone takes part in working for justice and racial equity. This is of utmost importance to school climate, because teaching SEL from an equity-based lens can improve student connectedness by strengthening student bonds with their peers, improving students' engagement in learning, and supporting their relationships with teachers and staff. Because CASEL defines the five core competencies of SEL as self-awareness; social awareness; self-management; relationship skills; and responsible decision making, these competencies are inextricably linked to creating a world and school climate where *all* students and staff work to prevent harm and promote peace. It is imperative for every single student to feel as though FPS belongs to them just as much as anyone else. This goal can only be accomplished by increased SEL training for staff, especially from an evidence-based, equity-focused method. In order for all FPS students to learn best and to thrive, we need to meet each student where they are – and that includes their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and expression, religion, etc. There is an opportunity to actively work to prevent trauma and crises of mental health. Through Fairfield's commitment to these actionable steps, we can help all FPS students thrive and receive the support they need and deserve to flourish academically, socially, and emotionally.

Conclusion
Conventional disciplinary measures rattle and fracture the implementation of justice in our community and often disproportionately harm BIPOC students. Rather than bringing students, families and administrators onto common ground, exclusionary disciplinary policies create deep divides, alienating everyone involved. FEC strongly recommends that punitive measures like suspension and expulsions are replaced with restorative justice measures. This is a shift away from reactive and isolating approaches to justice towards proactive, community-strengthening ones. We also recommend ongoing social-emotional learning (SEL) training for all counseling staff, a multi-disciplinary approach that centers the psychological components of academics. In line with this social-emotional approach, we call for FPS investment in cultural-competent, affinity-based counselling, wherein students are matched with counselors who share a common identity.

Summary of Recommendations:
- *Integrate restorative justice at the classroom, school, and community level.*
- *Get counsel from professional speakers and initiative guides.*
- *Incorporate restorative justice into the District Improvement Plan.*
- *Hire more BIPOC counselors and create racial caucus safe spaces.*
- *Conduct audits of our existing mental health and counseling programs.*
- *Train staff in Social and Emotional Learning.*
- *Acknowledge and work around racial and socio-economic barriers to equity in SEL implementation.*
- *Educate staff on racial and cultural impact on students' social-emotional health and learning style.*

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Actionable Change No. 7 - Create an explicit, district-wide anti-racism policy and establish a community-based restorative justice committee to prevent and repair harm in cases of discrimination and harassment in FPS.

Student Perspectives

"I haven't had an encounter with blatant racism, but my brother has as a student of FPS so I will share his experience (I have his permission). My siblings and I are biracial; We have a White mother and a South Asian, Muslim father. My brother has encountered racist verbal remarks from peers calling him a "terrorist", which I would imagine is not an uncommon occurrence for many other South Asian Americans in FPS. My brother's peers would say these things to him jokingly and my brother would laugh it off. My mom and I did not discover that this was going on until we saw his yearbook, which to our horror, was not signed with the usual "HAGS", but rather sickening racist remarks. Things like "ur a terrorist but we still love you" and "I hope you don't blow up the school"(we have photos, if you'd like them). My brother never said a word or reported it to anyone because he said that they were "jokes", and I suppose that he probably took them in stride because they were par for the course at that point. The most striking part of this for me was that children as young as 12 understood power structures and their place and privilege within them. White children had the bravery to write these derogatory

statements because they knew their punishment, if any, would probably just be a slap on the wrist. At the end of the day, their Whiteness was a "get out of jail free card". As for my brother, at the very least, his silence would allow him to stay in certain social circles and avoid ostracism from his White peers, and at the most, he believed on some level, through years of learned internalized racism, that there was nothing wrong with it." - Class of 2024

"Swept under the rug-always! It is not surprising though, we rarely had any conversations about race when I attended FLHS. So why would staff/administrators know how to talk about race if they literally never mention it?"

Faculty and Staff Perspectives

"I think there needs to be a policy, at the BOE level, that addresses White Fragility. How will the school handle White pushback from parents, students, and colleagues? I believe such a policy would be good to expand the disciplinary approach of restorative justice initiative to helping White people with the White Fragility they may experience." - Ninth-Twelfth Grade teacher on what they want to see changed within the FPS curriculum, specifically regarding anti-racism and anti-Blackness.

Introduction

In order to foster a welcoming and safe learning environment, FPS has a responsibility to protect and to stand in solidarity with BIPOC students who face discrimination and harassment at school. FEC calls for the establishment of a district-wide **anti-racism** policy, **restorative justice** counselor, and restorative justice committee. An anti-racism policy will make clear to all members of FPS that the diversity of the school community is valued and that its faculty and administrators are committed to ensuring the equitable treatment of all students. It will also provide a core set of values on which to center discussions of race and **equity**. In alignment with these values, we urge FPS to integrate a restorative justice counselor into harassment and discrimination case investigations within FPS. We call on FPS to implement a restorative justice committee, a permanent and diverse committee of students, parents, faculty, and administrators who have received extensive restorative justice training (see Actionable Change No. 6). This committee, while not involved in investigations, will gather data on suspensions, expulsions, harassment, discrimination, and other harms that BIPOC students face at a disproportionate rate in our school communities (Wentzell, 2019). For legal reasons, students cannot be directly involved in disciplinary proceedings involving other students, however, we propose that students on the committee can analyze anonymized data in order to find patterns and decipher root causes.

The restorative justice committee will then use their findings to make continual recommendations to administrators on how to remedy these harms via widespread transformative and cooperative educational material. We recommend that this committee be composed of members from all levels of FPS (including but not limited to administrators, teachers, students, and parents) of all racial and ethnic backgrounds so as to involve and empower the entire FPS community.

Research

FPS Anti-Racism Policy
To date, there exists no formal anti-racism policy for FPS. While the BOE has a non-discrimination policy, it is clear, from national and FEC data, discrimination remains a frequent issue. Within FPS specifically, discrimination appears to be a particularly large issue – in the 2019 Fairfield School Climate Survey, almost half (43.51%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that "Adults at my [secondary] school apply the same rules to all students equally," which indicates that a significant number of students are being discriminated against. In order to properly address the extent of racial and ethnic harassment and discrimination, FEC recommends that FPS institute an explicit district-wide anti-racism policy that will provide a core set of principles and values on which to conduct anti-racist work.

Handling of Discrimination and Harassment Cases in FPS
In accordance with FPS' non-discrimination policy, the Superintendent is responsible for instituting specific coordinators for discrimination mitigation under multiple legal acts, including Title VI and Title IX (FPS, 2010). To resolve these discrimination cases, FPS currently recommends that students discuss the problem with their teacher or principal, followed by an escalation plan that involves contacting the Superintendent, BOE, and State Commissioner of Education (Title IX, 2004). We believe that this model largely ignores the instances in which students may be facing harassment or discrimination from their teachers/administrators or systemically from an organization, and leaves students open to potential retaliation (DOE, 2020). Furthermore, we believe that bringing issues of discrimination and harassment outside of the school community should be a last resort, since it puts the burden on the complainant and/or their family to take action. Wherever possible, efforts should be made to resolve the problem and restore justice within the community while preserving positive interpersonal connections, and as such, there exists a need for one or more trained district-wide restorative justice coordinators to provide support and solutions to these cases.

Additionally, FPS currently uses school climate surveys to quantitatively assess their success in adhering to climate guidelines as well as to make continual updates to BOE policy (FPS, 2004). While this process exists for school climate in general, FEC feels that there is a need to institute a parallel process for issues of racial harassment and discrimination. Namely, it is important to track data about the frequency, severity, and nature of these cases in order to discern patterns and make transformative recommendations to the larger FPS community. Therefore, there exists a need for a diverse and permanent restorative justice committee that will track this data specifically and be responsible for recommending updates to relevant BOE policies.

The Role of Restorative Justice
As discussed in Actionable Change No. 6, restorative justice reimagines disciplinary practices by emphasizing accountability through facilitated meetings and other joint exercises (Center for Justice and Reconciliation, 2020). In addition to promoting racial equity in school punitive systems, restorative justice has the unique ability to involve entire communities in harm reduction in a way that fosters positive, supportive connections and leads to long-lasting, sustainable changes. Implementing a

community-based restorative justice model allows victims of harassment and discrimination to recieve the support and care they need, and offenders will be provided a "teachable moment" that will facilitate immediate harm repair as well as long-term behavioral transformation.

Implementation

Implement a district-wide anti-racism policy. We strongly recommend that Fairfield BOE institute a district-wide anti-racism policy. Doing so will provide a core set of values on which to center conversations about racial and ethnic discrimination, with respect to both explicit harassment and **implicit biases.** In alignment with the goal of involving and empowering the entire FPS community, we strongly suggest that the anti-racism policy be borne out of honest and supportive conversations with students, parents, faculty, and the larger Fairfield community. We also suggest that the BOE consult with the restorative justice counselor and committee on the wording of the policy.

Create a restorative justice counselor. Currently, the BOE has publicized a Safe School Climate Plan that contains a set of core beliefs as well as organizational guidelines (FPS, 2004). This plan calls for the appointment of a School Climate Specialist (typically the school principal) and Committee. Based on the information presented above, FEC recommends that our proposed restorative justice counselor and committee follow a similar organization. Importantly, for the purposes of providing an unbiased third party to mediate cases of harassment and

Suggestions for Policy Implementations to Combat Racial Insensitivity or Discrimination From Teachers, Peers, and Administrators at FPS

12%

56%

32%

- Mandatory Presentations, Courses, and Training Across All Grade Levels Should be Implemented
- Mandatory Anti-Racism, Implicit Bias, and Restorative Justice Training Should be Implemented for Faculty and Staff on an Ongoing Basis
- An Investigative Report Team Should be Established

discrimination, FEC urges that the restorative justice counselor be a new hire from outside of FPS with a background in youth restorative justice initiatives. We recommend that this counselor work closely with the school climate specialist to ensure the implementation of the climate plan and anti-racism policy.

Create a restorative justice committee. In order to update the climate plan and anti-racism policy in accordance with relevant student experiences, we strongly recommend the institution of a restorative justice committee. This committee will be responsible for gathering data on equity-related issues and using this data to make continual updates to appropriate policies. Potential data to be gathered include, but is not limited to: suspension rates; expulsion rates; racial or ethnic harassment rates; rates at which teachers remove students from their classroom; and qualitative information on the nature of racial harassment. This committee must be diverse in race and ethnicity in order to represent these issues fairly

and without bias. It must also be a collaborative effort between students, parents, teachers, and administrators who bring different perspectives on these issues. Finally, the committee must receive extensive training (see Actionable Change No. 2) in restorative justice practices in order to make sound recommendations to policy changes that will result in widespread, transformative, and cooperative education.

Conclusion

While FPS seeks to create an inclusive, social learning environment that challenges students of all backgrounds to excel, it is apparent that discrimination and harassment are present features of the school climate. To challenge the existence of these harmful realities, we strongly advise that FPS creates an explicit, codified anti-racism policy that repudiates bigotry and intolerance. We believe that this policy must vibrantly illustrate the boundless value that each student's unique personality, ability, background and attributes brings to the school climate. While the policy should vehemently reject all forms of bias and discrimination, it ultimately must center on race and ethnicity, as BIPOC students face extreme discrimination in the nation at large. Along with this anti-racist policy, we reiterate the need for a shift in disciplinary policy, away from exclusionary practices towards community-based restorative practices. First, we advocate for the immediate hiring of a restorative justice counselor to serve as a third-party mediator in disputes related to harassment and discrimination within FPS. Second, we call upon FPS to design a restorative justice committee, a permanent and diverse association of students, parents, faculty, and administrators, trained extensively in restorative justice measures. It is our hope that this shift to restorative practices will create an environment where mistakes are thought of as teachable moments and opportunities for the entire community to grow together, meeting each other where we are to develop new understanding of our relationships to one another.

> ***Summary of Recommendations:***
> - *Implement a district-wide anti-racism policy.*
> - *Create a restorative justice counselor.*
> - *Create a restorative justice committee.*

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Actionable Change No. 8 - Develop opportunities for cross-cultural and cross-racial collaboration through extracurricular activities within and outside of the Fairfield community.

Student Perspectives

"It would have been great to integrate the Bridgeport and fairfield [sic] schools more — if at all"

"It's hard to consider what extracurriculars would be beneficial when there is a lack of basic racial equality. I would suggest a speaker on racial equality but if their teachers aren't modeling the proper behavior why would the students?" - Class of 2016

Faculty and Staff Perspectives

"From experience in clubs and organizations and state-wide conferences, the more students partner between vastly different demographic schools, the more those students realize that their pre-conceived notions and assumptions are incomplete. They realize they have some common ground and have more in common than they realize." - Ninth- Twelfth Grade teacher on FPS collaborating with other school districts within Connecticut to promote cross-cultural understandings.

"Many of the problems with education in general center on the fact that we work in silos. In order to integrate our understanding of one another, we need to come together as communities to soften our sharp divisions. We have both geographic and ideological divisions that are only perpetuated in the current climate(s)." - Sixth-Twelfth Grade teacher on FPS collaborating with other school districts within Connecticut to promote cross-cultural understandings.

"[anti-racism] is new for this district. We need to work together, learn and unlearn together, and lighten our load when making changes to curriculum. There are schools that are doing incredible ABAR[Anti-Biased Anti-Racism] work. It would be irresponsible not to learn from them. Another note about culture here- this idea of "cross-cultural understandings" feels a little confusing. I think it is important to name that we are looking to do ABAR work." - Third and Fourth Grade teacher on FPS collaborating with other school districts within Connecticut to promote cross-cultural understandings.

Introduction

While students construct an understanding of race through school curriculum, extracurricular activities provide opportunities for FPS students to learn from experience and form unbiased views of their local communities. It is imperative that programs conducted both within FPS and in the community at large promote **racial equity** and collaboration without establishing White savior narratives or reinforcing cultural divides. FPS must support an extracurricular environment in which students can develop **cultural competency** through equity-focused clubs, inter-school collaboration, and partnerships within the community. To achieve this, FPS should adapt its existing extracurricular activities by requiring clubs and programs to create written equity plans and to integrate diversity events and discussions into their programming. We also call upon FPS to allocate long-term funding to create new equity-based initiatives

in experiential learning, while increasing administrative support for existing programs. Specifically, we suggest that FPS work closely with Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS) to create a peer-to-peer enrichment program.

Research

Cultural Competency in School Systems
Students learn about cultural and racial differences best through experience, suggesting the need for extracurricular programs with a cross-cultural and cross-racial focus to supplement classroom learning (Eyler, 2015). The implementation of such programs provides a firsthand, experiential opportunity for students to further develop cultural competency, as discussed in Actionable Change No. 2, outside of the classroom environment. Cultural competency not only develops a simple understanding and acceptance of different people, but a *desire* to seek out different perspectives from one's own. It aids in the development of a school climate that is welcoming to all, by all. Just as teachers must be culturally competent, students must have opportunities to build this competence as well. Developing cultural competence is especially effective with school-aged children; research supports that attending culturally-inclusive programs with directors who are culturally competent increases the likelihood that youth will understand their "backgrounds and the backgrounds of others based on positive assets and the benefits of diversity," rather than negative assets formed by stereotyping and **implicit bias** (Kennedy et.al, 2007). Inter-district cross collaboration, therefore, can help students learn to cherish divergent perspectives while developing a positive relationship to their larger community.

FPS Cross-Cultural Opportunities
Even though Fairfield and Bridgeport are adjacent school districts, the arbitrary line that divides these students is significant and isolating, suggesting the need for enhanced inter-school collaboration. While 33.8% of the students that attend Bridgeport Public Schools identify as Black or African American (Johnson, 2020), only 2.3% of Fairfield students identify as Black or African American (Jones, 2020). 48.4% of Bridgeport students identify as Hispanic or Latinx, and 13.3% identify as White (Johnson, 2020), whereas 11.5% of Fairfield students identify as Hispanic or Latinx and an overwhelming 75.6% identify as White (Jones, 2020). The different demographics of the Fairfield and Bridgeport school districts provide an excellent opportunity for students of both districts to develop relationships with peers who have different backgrounds, and furthermore, broaden their cultural understanding of their town. To be clear, FEC's focus in advocating for inter-district extracurricular collaboration with BPS is *not* to expose FPS' majority-White student population to racially diverse environments for the mere sake of doing so. That, as previously discussed, is textbook **White saviorism**. Rather, this collaboration is meant to help break down the artificial barrier segregating students by race and socioeconomic class, and provide *mutually beneficial* extracurricular opportunities. These types of experiential opportunities, when framed and ran appropriately, are effective ways to unlearn harmful racial stereotypes and explicitly racist views, and promote respect and understanding between both communities.

At the high school level, Youth for Equity (YFE) at Fairfield Ludlowe and Fairfield Warde Voices for Equity (FWVE) are student-led clubs that educate and uplift others, embrace differences, and engage with subjects impacting marginalized and underrepresented groups (YFE, 2020). FWVE has hosted and
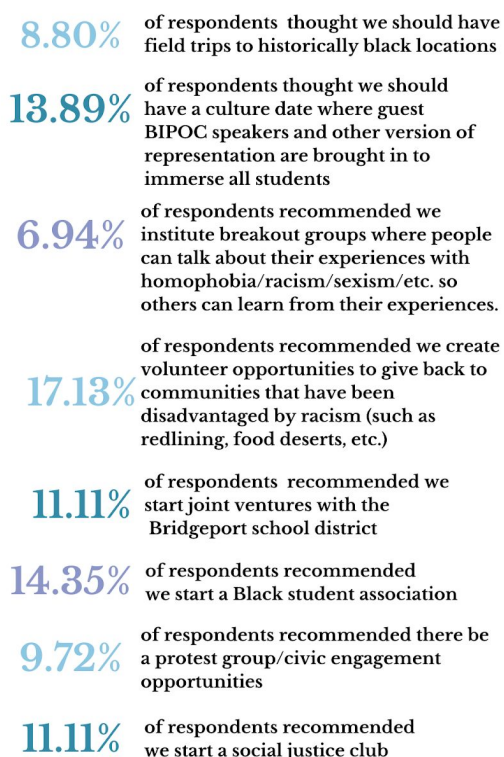
organized an annual, student-focused conference at Fairfield University empowering youth to amplify their voices in order to break down barriers in their schools and throughout communities (FPS, 2019), which YFE has attended. Now including districts from across the region and state, the Fairfield Warde Equity Conference provides an example of effective inter-school collaboration which could be broadened to promote equity within FPS. These organizations are examples of existing equity-based groups that FPS can support with long-term funding, infrastructure, and administrative support.

Implementation

The adjacent graphic summarizes responses to the question "What extracurricular experiences should FPS offer to enhance learning about relevant social justice issues?" Popular response categories like field trips are elaborated on in other sections (see Actionable Change No. 3). The following recommendations represent the desire of student respondents to collaborate with surrounding school districts, like BPS.

WHAT EXTRACURRICULAR EXPERIENCES SHOULD FPS OFFER TO ENHANCE LEARNING ABOUT RELEVANT SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES?

8.80% of respondents thought we should have field trips to historically black locations

13.89% of respondents thought we should have a culture date where guest BIPOC speakers and other version of representation are brought in to immerse all students

6.94% of respondents recommended we institute breakout groups where people can talk about their experiences with homophobia/racism/sexism/etc. so others can learn from their experiences.

17.13% of respondents recommended we create volunteer opportunities to give back to communities that have been disadvantaged by racism (such as redlining, food deserts, etc.)

11.11% of respondents recommended we start joint ventures with the Bridgeport school district

14.35% of respondents recommended we start a Black student association

9.72% of respondents recommended there be a protest group/civic engagement opportunities

11.11% of respondents recommended we start a social justice club

Adapt existing FPS extracurricular programs and create new cross-district partnered community programs. In alignment with the research presented above, FEC urges FPS to create and support extracurricular programs with a cross-cultural and cross-racial focus to supplement classroom learning. Two methods for implementing such programs include (1) adapting existing FPS extracurricular programs to include an equity focus and (2) creating partnered community programs with BPS. FPS must create inclusivity plans within existing clubs unrelated to equity, develop novel supplemental experiences with a specific equity focus, and allocate long-term funding and administrative support to each. Cultural competency cannot be developed solely within school walls, and therefore extracurricular programs should be utilized to facilitate cross-cultural and cross-racial exchange.

Require all clubs to create and publicly release racial equity plans. Although clubs facilitating diversity and inclusion already exist at FPS (FLHS, 2016; FPS, 2019; FPS, 2020), requiring all clubs and organizations to create and publicly release racial equity plans is an important step toward dismantling racist policies that will ensure a welcoming environment for **BIPOC** students. The establishment of equity plans for all extracurricular activities should be reinforced by long-term funding. The proposed 2020-2021 budget for FPS seemingly does not include funding for extracurricular programs (FPS Budget, 2020). However, in the past the Parent Teacher Association has provided grants to activities that focus on diversity and equity

issues (FPS Budget, 2020). It is important that future funding for extracurricular activities be contingent upon the development and release of policies for equity and racial inclusion. These policies must be updated and funding re-evaluated on an annual cycle.

Integrate equity focused events and discussions into club programming. Programs that do not formally center around equity nevertheless have ample opportunity to incorporate equity into their mission, since the underlying principles behind racial equity intersect with virtually all facets of life (see A Note on Intersectionality). As such, we call for FPS to integrate equity-oriented events and discussions into their programming. For example, the American Cancer Society at Ludlowe and Warde can incorporate social and economic justice within its mission of fundraising for cancer research, since cancer affects **marginalized groups** on a disproportionate level (National Cancer Institute, 2019). In this way, clubs can better achieve their goals of serving our community and encouraging individual expression, regardless of focus area. FPS must encourage extracurricular programs to cross cultural barriers when interacting in the school and community, and provide access and opportunity for marginalized students to engage in leadership within these organizations where they have often been dismissed or denied. Socially inclusive clubs must reflect the demographics of their participants and constantly re-evaluate their strategies to form a more equitable climate (Special Olympics). As such, faculty advisors, student leaders, and administrators should be required to hold each other accountable in this process and report their progress at the end of each year.

Partner FPS community service groups with those in Bridgeport to foster cultural competency. In addition to modifying existing extracurriculars, FEC strongly suggests that FPS take measures toward pursuing a peer-to-peer collaborative program with BPS. As mentioned before, the different demographics of the two nearby school systems provide an opportunity for students to engage with people of different backgrounds, challenge their previous beliefs, and form positive, supportive connections within their local community. Community service is one pathway for students to engage in our community and develop an understanding of and appreciation for diversity first-hand. Clubs focusing on community service at FWHS and FLHS, including AFS, Key Club, and Interact, have the potential to partner with organizations centered in Bridgeport as a way to develop cultural competency (Warde Student Club Catalog, 2019).

Avoid White saviorism framework and narratives. Students from FPS and other school districts can learn and benefit equally from cross-cultural programs; these programs are, and must be seen as, mutually beneficial. The goal of these programs is for all students to learn from one another and gain valuable insight into new perspectives through shared activity. As such, it is important that neither perspective be considered "better" than the other, and that students be taught to avoid saviorism mindsets – racial, socioeconomic, or otherwise. **White saviorism** is defined as "practices, processes, and institutions that reify historical inequities to ultimately validate White privilege" (Anderson, 2013). Saviorism mindsets result in individuals feeling that they are "doing good" by engaging in diversity and equity initiatives, rather than learning from the experience, investigating their own biases, and examining their own **privilege** (Aaronson, 2017) To reiterate, the goal is this collaboration is not charity, apologies or selfish individual growth, but rather the creation of mutually beneficial, educational, and uplifting experiences that create lasting human connections that transcend borders and eradicate harmful biases. With proper

framing and the appropriate activities, students will understand cross-cultural programs as collaborative and equally beneficial between the two groups of students (Brownlee, N.d.). If this framework is not established and continually emphasized, inter-district activities can create or perpetuate harmful racist thinking and notions of White supremacy, consequences that are *entirely* antithetical to the purpose of this Actionable Change.

The recommendations outlined in this section require changes to current funding structures. See our discussion of funding in Actionable Change No. 10 for further information.

Conclusion

Extracurricular activities are an essential part of adolescence. They give developing students the opportunity to build lasting relationships, learn valuable life skills and understand what it means to be a part of a greater community. These qualities make extracurricular activities excellent sites for students to learn about diversity and become more culturally competent. FPS must establish a community-wide extracurricular environment that transcends the borders of Fairfield, centering equity-focused clubs, inter-school collaboration, and partnerships within the community. FEC recommends that FPS generate discussions and events that represent the cultural diversity of our state, our nation, and our world. We believe that all clubs and organizations should follow in the footsteps of equity clubs like FWVE and FLYE, and publish written equity plans that prioritize reflexivity and the inclusion of overlooked narratives within existing extracurricular activities. Finally, it is essential that FPS students, administrators and teachers re-examine the socially-complex relationship between FPS and BPS, by creating a mutual-enrichment program that moves beyond the White savior narratives that only reinforce cultural divides towards an affinal restructuring of our communities.

> ***Summary of Recommendations***:
> - *Adapt existing FPS extracurricular programs and create new cross-district partnered community programs*.
> - *Require all clubs to create and publicly release racial equity plans*.
> - *Integrate diversity events and discussions into club programming*.
> - *Partner FPS community service groups with those in Bridgeport to foster cultural competency*.
> - *Avoid White saviorism framework and narratives*.

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Actionable Change No. 9 - Create a permanent, diverse committee of trained students, parents, faculty, and relevant professionals to inform Fairfield Public School's future curricular and policy decisions relating to race and equity.

Student Perspectives

"I feel that the ADL presentation was not enough. It was only given to students freshman year, and was not relevant. It eve [sic] showed a video from the 90s. That is not an accurate representation of discrimination today." - Class of 2022 on their feelings towards the tools (e.g. bullying assemblies, active bystander lectures) that could allow them to stand up for a peer who faced racial discrimination.

"I think I have learned to stand go for a peer that is going through racial discrimination but not because of the tools school has given me." - Class of 2022 on their feelings towards the tools (e.g. bullying assemblies, active bystander lectures) that could allow them to stand up for a peer who faced racial discrimination.

"We cannot simply go to lectures on these topics. We must have daily conversations about these issues and educators must be trained to handle these situations and have these conversations" - Class of 2009 on their feelings towards the tools (e.g. bullying assemblies, active bystander lectures)

that could allow them to stand up for a peer who faced racial discrimination.

"I can stand up for my peers but not bc (because) of anything FPS has taught me" - Class of 2016 on their feelings towards the tools (e.g. bullying assemblies, active bystander lectures) that could allow them to stand up for a peer who faced racial discrimination.

"I don't think the topic of racial discrimination was touched upon as an example of bullying and things of that nature." - Class of 2016 on their feelings towards the tools (e.g. bullying assemblies, active bystander lectures) that could allow them to stand up for a peer who faced racial discrimination.

"*I honestly didn't realize there was such a thing as racial discrimination until I started at a private high school after attending FPS elementary and middle school so I would say they absolutely did not prepare us. They didn't even teach us about White privilege."* - Class of 2015 on their feelings towards the tools (e.g. bullying assemblies, active bystander lectures) that could allow them to stand up for a peer who faced racial discrimination.

"going back a step we first need to educate students to even be able to identify racial discrimination and bias!!" - Class of 2016 on their feelings towards the tools (e.g. bullying assemblies, active bystander lectures) that could allow them to stand up for a peer who faced racial discrimination.

Teacher Perspectives

"I feel like we need to be extremely sensitive to the developmental stages of the students in our charge when discussing racism." - Seventh and Eighth Grade teacher

Introduction

FPS must make a concerted effort to amplify the voices of **marginalized communities** within our school system and center conversations on **racial equity** around these voices. The above quotes from students, faculty, and staff express frustration over the present lack of effective infrastructure to democratically inform the development of future district policy and curricular decisions. By involving students, as well as other community members like parents, educators, and other professionals, school administrators will become equipped to support and address the concerns of all students and families. We urge FPS to implement a panel of students, parents, educators, interested community members, and relevant professionals to represent the racial diversity in FPS for all curricular and policy decisions relating to race and equity. In order to meet the needs of all students, FPS must create a seat at the table for young people in every important curricular and policy decision relating to education. Only when students are partners within these conversations and decisions will FPS be able to advance educational equity and adequately support all students.

Research

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education recently created a webpage dedicated to sharing articles and resources on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with CT Boards of Education; however, the page is not actively maintained or updated. While the commitment to equity at the district level ebbs and flows, data suggest implementing a diverse committee dedicated to promoting racial equity would benefit the district significantly.

FEC understands that FPS and the BOE encourage input from parents, students and the public on education reform. The purpose of establishing a permanent, community-based committee to inform future decisions on curricular and policy decisions related to race, however, is to further democratize the process of *creating* education itself. Establishing a permanent committee of parents, teachers, and educational leaders to work in tandem with curriculum coordinators will ensure the curricula of tomorrow will properly represent different racial groups and cultures. While adding more voices to any discussion may complicate the process, research suggests that policy change is most effective "when it is informed by people with real experience" (BBA, 2020). Importantly, this committee is mutually beneficial: FPS curriculum coordinators and the other relevant professionals would provide their expertise in crafting curricula, while community members can inform this process by sharing their lived experiences that fall outside any professional training. Students are ultimately the most effective at providing feedback since the curriculum is designed with them in mind. Given the amount of time students spend in school, and how determinative it is for their later success in life, they should have a prominent voice in the content and style of their education through a permanent community-based committee.

Because the BOE is an all-White body, as is most of the FPS administration, discussions surrounding race and equity are inherently limited, no matter the amount of exposure one has to issues regarding race (FPS Citizen's Guide, 2020) (FPS Board Members, 2019). Since training on cultural competency and racial sensitivity are limited or absent in most positions in the BOE and FPS administration, the district would be strengthened by a broadened perspective which incorporates the lived perspectives of BIPOC students which are, at this point, not adequately represented.

Consulting with a diverse committee can also resolve the ongoing issues of functional bias and low cognitive diversity (Lewis, 2017). According to Harvard Business Review, teams facing new uncertain and complex situations "solve problems faster where they're more cognitively diverse" (Lewis, 2017). Following this logic, the BOE would experience an improved ability to resolve problems and budget money more effectively in consultation with a community-based committee. Homogeneity of thought excludes certain points of view which are integral to understanding the full scope of the effects of certain policy implementations (Marsh, 2003). Should the BOE consult a racially diverse committee dedicated to informing policy, budgetary, and curriculum changes, important decisions would consider perspectives otherwise overlooked without such a committee.

Implementation
Create a student and community advisory committee. FEC recommends that FPS creates a committee that incorporates racially diverse voices from students, parents, educators, and community members to inform curriculum and policy decisions. It must be reiterated that this committee be diverse in race and ethnicity in order to represent all students and provide an opportunity to balance the **implicit biases** which are inherently a component of an all-White decision-making body. Additionally, we recommend that committee members are provided basic training in areas similar to those outlined in Actionable Change Nos. 2 and 3. Once it is established, specific tasks appropriate for this committee include: informing curriculum changes (with guidance from Actionable Change No. 1), advising updates to the Student Handbook and school climate guidelines, and helping implement racial equity reforms generally.

Develop explicit guidelines to this committee. Examples across the nation of similar community advisory boards provide valuable insight into the effective implementation of this Actionable Change. The National School Boards Association (NSBA) has provided a particularly useful framework for advisory committees, which addresses the goals to be achieved and actions to be taken (CABE). These objectives include representing diversity, addressing student and family concerns, collaborating with district leaders and administrators, and recommending meaningful actions to further change (CABE). The NSBA also recommends that the advisory committee monitor progress of these changes and communicate developments to the community (CABE). Additionally, Duke University's student government has created the Equity and Outreach Committee as an arm of their student government, which may act as a useful template for FPS (Wang, 2017). The committee works with the Black Student Alliance, Mi Gente (the Latinx student association), the Asian Student Association, the Native American Student Association, and Diya (the South Asian student association) (Wang, 2017). This gives BIPOC students the opportunity to voice concerns specific to marginalized groups, but also to collaborate as a whole to enact change.

Refer to Brookfield's model for guidance. Brookfield Public Schools in Connecticut published their Resolution on Promoting Diversity and Equity for 2020, which FPS can use to inform its actions (CABE, 2020). The resolution outlines the role of the district's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee and the list of beliefs which will inform future policy recommendations (CABE, 2020). Portions of these statements read as follows: "that every student in our care has the right to an equitable educational experience - regardless of race, religion, ability, ethnicity, identity, socioeconomic status, or gender," "that institutional racism and bias promote barriers to student learning, create academic gaps, and directly conflict with the core values and beliefs of Brookfield Public Schools," and "student, parent, staff, and community voices are integral in building a climate of trust, respect, and dignity while creating opportunities that minimize disparities in educational outcomes" (CABE, 2020). The committee's role, as outlined by the resolution, will be to support and monitor academic and extracurricular activities, including curriculum, and act as a liaison between students and staff. Progress will be measured by monitoring the achievement gap between different racial groups, increased evidence of cultural sensitivity and competence, and sentiments of students and staff (CABE, 2020).

Conclusion

We strongly recommend that the FPS demonstrates its commitment to anti-racism by establishing a permanent, diverse committee of community and school members to inform future policy and curriculum decisions relating to race. It is essential that this committee represents the racial diversity that exists, despite often being overlooked, in Fairfield and the myriad of different cultures and perspectives across the nation and globe. Democratizing these processes will ensure people of different racial identities can inform these future decisions in ways they have previously been unable to do. In turn, these varied perspectives can potentially rectify harmful narratives or misconceptions previously unnoticed in curriculum development.

Note: While this report is narrowly focused on racial equity, a community advisory body can be implemented for broader equity concerns like LGBTQIA+ and religious issues, among others. As we expressed in the beginning of this report, the underlying principles and strategies foundational to racial equity are applicable to equity broadly, like in the case of this Actionable Change.

> ### *Summary of Recommendations*:
> - *Create a student and community advisory committee.*
>   - *Develop explicit guidelines to this committee.*
>   - *Refer to Brookfield's model for guidance*.

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Actionable Change No. 10 - Establish a detailed, measurable plan for implementation of the actionable changes of this report and maintain a direct, transparent channel of communication regarding progress.

Introduction

The first nine Actionable Changes provide extensive recommendations for promoting **racial equity** within FPS. These recommendations vary widely in type and scope, from larger efforts like redesigning curricula across all subjects to promote anti-racism and racially diverse perspectives, to smaller measures

like developing field trips to cultural centers and museums. Creating and maintaining racial equity is a complex process that will inevitably take time and a sustained effort -- an effort, however, that must begin now. The purpose of this Actionable Change is to highlight our preliminary interpretation of the logistical processes behind all of our recommendations. As we begin discussions with the BOE, Superintendent Cummings, and the Fairfield community at large regarding the content of this report, our recommendations are likely to evolve. However these discussions pan out, FEC is committed to establishing transparent, regular communication and accountability channels so progress towards our ultimate and unwavering goals of achieving racial equity, decolonized curricula, and anti-racism in the classroom are realized. This section summarizes the recommendations made throughout the report and distinguishes between the short- and long-term remedies of each Actionable Change. We additionally developed a proposed timeline that estimates, in our view, how much time each reform will take to enact. Furthermore, we outline several funding mechanisms that may help actualize these changes. Finally, we understand the following measures are limited to our own perspective; therefore, we hope our discussions with the BOE will finalize a codified system of communication and accountability.

Summary of all Implementation Recommendations

[Actionable Change No. 1:](#) **Implement mandatory anti-racism, implicit bias, and restorative justice training led by independent professionals for all faculty and staff on a frequent and ongoing basis.**

Short term recommendation: We believe that the **decolonization** of FPS is crucial to the development of a more socially conscious community. As such, we encourage teachers to include **anti-racism** lessons and principles in their classrooms to the best of their ability until permanent changes to curricula can be made. They can accomplish this with their students by having conversations about social justice, exploring racial identity, and diversifying instructional resources. We propose collaboration with the BOE on a document of anti-racism resources to aid teachers in these endeavors.

Long term recommendation: Ultimately, FEC calls for alteration of the district's curriculum to ensure anti-racism informs every lesson across all subjects and grade levels. This reimagination of curriculum would amplify the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of **marginalized groups** across disciplines. We seek a collaborative process for the improvement of FPS curriculum and ask that the BOE communicates its plans to pursue this. As each subject is reviewed and revised in accordance with the 2015-2024 Curriculum Renewal Calendar, we urge changes to align with the proposals in this report.

[Actionable Change No. 2:](#) **Implement mandatory anti-racism, implicit bias, and restorative justice training led by independent professionals for all faculty and staff on a frequent and ongoing basis.**

Short term recommendation: Teachers should be encouraged to do their own research on these topics, and should be ready to discuss them in future training sessions. Though there is no definitive text on introducing anti-racist teaching tools into the classroom, the USC anti-racism pedagogy guide is an example of an in-depth collection of articles that discuss teaching while embracing anti-racist teaching tactics. It can be found [here](#).

Long term recommendation: We recommend that FPS not only be transparent about whether or not they have hired professionals to have any race-related training sessions since March 2017, but we also urge that, in the short-term, FPS guarantees at least one professional is brought in every 6 months at minimum to conduct a seminar or period-structured instructional time on race, race education/consciousness, and/or cultural competency. In the long-term, the frequency of this professional development should increase until it is a regular and frequent component to teacher and staff training.

[Actionable Change No. 3](#)*: Implement mandatory presentations, courses, and training across all grade levels where students will learn about the social construction of racial and cultural identity and its influence on themselves and others.*

Short term recommendation: FEC encourages FPS to begin considering and planning for presentations, courses, and training for students on topics concerning race. Immediate steps to be taken towards student racial awareness and understanding include diversifying texts in classrooms, organizing presentations, and reaching out to speakers. Due to current circumstances concerning COVID-19, we understand that assemblies and other large-audience programs may not be possible for some time, but we encourage FPS to begin planning for them, including online zoom options in the interim. We also ask that the middle school Character Education Program and Seventh Grade Anti-Bullying Program are updated to focus on racial inclusivity.

Long term recommendation: We strongly encourage presentations, assemblies, and events for students regarding race to be regularly scheduled, and ask that the BOE curates and releases a plan for continuous programming of these racial awareness and education programs. We also ask that FPS offers a wider range of diversity-oriented electives and incorporates new field trips into curriculum to enhance racially diverse education.

[Actionable Change No. 4](#)*: Recruit, hire, and retain racially diverse, culturally competent school faculty and staff.*

Short term recommendation: We encourage the BOE to promptly develop a new policy statement declaring commitment to diversifying FPS's educator workforce. Subsequently, we urge FPS to supplement their recruiting and hiring guidelines as soon as possible to ensure that new staff are diverse and **culturally competent**. We ask that a set of interview questions regarding cultural competency and a specific guide to recruiting more diverse staff in accordance with state law SB 1022 (PA 19-74) be developed, and we encourage FPS to begin looking into recruiting BIPOC educators from other institutions as well as within our own schools.

Long term recommendation: FEC recommends that the BOE develops sustainable initiatives to increase accountability and oversight of new diverse recruiting and hiring practices. We suggest that a BIPOC teacher recruitment training program is implemented for local and regional BOE members to support equitable recruitment practices. We recommend that local education agencies are required to submit and publish annual reports detailing their efforts to diversify their educator workforce, and we propose the

development of a BIPOC Educator Recruitment and Retention Plan to ensure that the demographics of students and educators is proportional.

In the long term, focus must also be made on retaining BIPOC staff, an objective that we ask to be pursued by expanding upon the Teacher Education And Mentoring (TEAM) Program by including Black ERGs and EAPs and the teacher mortgage assistance program by supporting affordable housing.

Actionable Change No. 5: *Redesign the pathways to success to meet the needs of all students and ensure that race, socioeconomic status, etc. will not predict any student's educational outcome.*

Short term recommendation: We recommend that FPS begins reconsideration of student pathways to and metrics of success. We also ask that the BOE makes a statement asking teachers (especially AP teachers) to de-emphasize the importance of standardized testing to avoid "teaching to the test."

Long term recommendation: In the long term, FEC recommends that FPS reimagines the expectations of success for students to ensure that they are not segregated by ability. We recommend that FPS eliminate the elementary gifted and talented program and extend the benefits and structuring of those programs such as better resources, tailored instruction, and collaborative environments, to all classes. Furthermore, we recommend the removal of middle school math tracking and the creation of open enrollment for all high school subjects so that students can fulfill their true academic potentials without hindrance from misunderstanding course expectations, personal insecurity, or teacher recommendations.

In addition to expectations of success, we recommend that FPS makes several changes to the ways in which student progress is measured. We recommend implementing a requirement for narrative evaluations of student progress to be included on report cards, as well as providing professional development surrounding these evaluations. We also recommend that FPS seriously consider removing weighted GPA.

We understand that the elimination of programs are more radical recommendations, and we hope to further discuss our research-based suggestions with the BOE in the future as we move forward in our collaborative approach to developing equitable education for Fairfield.

Actionable Change No. 6: *Reimagine discipline systems by shifting towards restorative practices and invest in resources that will support and empower all students.*

Short term recommendation: We encourage the district to have the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI) conduct an audit of FPS' mental health programs as soon as possible; this way, they can work with the district to implement recommendations in order to develop an intensive, trauma-informed program involving mental health practices. We also encourage that staff do their own research on social-emotional learning in order to better understand how to discipline their students, but collectively educating staff on how racial and cultural factors can play into students' social-emotional health is also necessary.

Long term recommendation: It is important that a permanent system of restorative justice is implemented within FPS, rather than the exclusionary disciplinary practices that are used currently (ISS, detentions). In order to implement this, a three-pronged approach is necessary, involving the classroom, school, and home facets. In the classroom, curriculum and instruction changes must occur. More broadly in schools, practices and policies must be revised. We urge the hiring of a restorative justice coordinator to facilitate and monitor this progress, as well as the hiring of professional speakers over time to help with implementation. Finally, this social-emotional learning should extend to the homes of students and community members. To do this, the school system should be transparent about its disciplinary policies in the future. It is important that these changes are incorporated into the District Improvement Plan.

Furthermore, BIPOC counselors and psychologists should be hired into FPS at higher rates. It is important to give BIPOC students the opportunity to speak with professionals who can empathize with their experiences on a more personal level.

It is necessary that FPS train their counseling staff in social-emotional learning. This training should be ongoing, and it is important that the training covers the importance of culturally affirming social-emotional learning, as much of these practices are based in White, heteronormative, patriarchal beliefs and can be damaging to BIPOC students. With this being said, racial and socio-economic barriers must be acknowledged in training and in implementation.

[Actionable Change No. 7](): *Create an explicit, district-wide anti-racism policy and establish a community-based restorative justice committee to prevent and repair harm in cases of discrimination and harassment in FPS.*

Short term recommendation: We recommend that FPS begins seeking out and recruiting outside-of-the-district hires to develop a committee that deals with restorative justice.

Long term recommendation: We urge that the Fairfield BOE implement a permanent, district-wide anti-racism policy that is borne out of honest conversations with all members of the FPS community. Additionally, we suggest that FPS hire a restorative justice counselor and that they create an indefinite committee to offer an unbiased third-party perspective on all cases involving discrimination (gender, religion, race, etc). It is important that this counselor is a new outside hire with a background in youth restorative justice initiatives. The committee should be diverse and should be made up of students, parents, and faculty to ensure that different perspectives are addressed when resolving issues.

[Actionable Change No. 8](): *Develop opportunities for cross-cultural and cross-racial collaboration through extracurricular activities within and outside of the Fairfield community.*

Short term recommendation: Existing extracurricular activities within the district should be made aware of the importance of promoting equity in their practices. All clubs should consider equity in every aspect of their work, and should begin incorporating diversity events and discussions into their programming.

Long term recommendation: We urge FPS to create and support long-term extracurricular programs with cross-cultural and cross-racial focuses to supplement classroom learning. To achieve this, partnered community programs with Bridgeport Public Schools should be implemented. In addition, all clubs should be required to publicly release annual racial equity plans in order to facilitate a more welcoming environment for all students.

We also advise FPS to partner its community service groups with those in Bridgeport to foster cultural competency. A peer-to-peer collaborative program of this nature would provide an opportunity for students to engage with people of different backgrounds, challenge their previous beliefs, and form positive, supportive connections within their local community. It is important that FPS is intentional with framing when creating these collaborations and that they emphasize mutual benefit rather than **White saviorism**. Allocating funding for the creation of these programs will be necessary. We strongly suggest that funding be prioritized for clubs conducting explicit equity-based work, where applicable.

Actionable Change No. 9: Create a permanent, diverse committee of trained students, parents, faculty, and relevant professionals to inform Fairfield Public School's future curricular and policy decisions relating to race and equity.

Short term recommendation: Begin seeking out and recruiting community members and trained professionals to make up committees pertaining to policy making within the district.

Long term recommendation: We recommend the creation of a perpetual student and community oversight committee to incorporate student voices as well as diverse parent, educator, and community member voices within its policy and curricular decisions. It is important that this committee is diverse and that its members undergo ongoing restorative justice training to ensure that they are properly supported. The district should use local and national examples of advisory committees as models when creating their own.

Proposed Timeline
The following timeline is our initial estimation of the necessary amount of time to implement our recommendations from each Actionable Change (AC), based on our understanding of what is required to actualize these changes. We look forward to hearing from the BOE to negotiate changes to the timeline as needed.

Phase I: 3-6 Months
- Release a policy statement declaring commitment to diversifying educator workforce. (AC4)
- Make a statement asking teachers (especially AP teachers) to de-emphasize the importance of standardized testing. (AC5)
- Have the CHDI conduct an audit of mental health programs. (AC6)
- Encourage staff to do research on social-emotional learning. (AC6)
- Seek out and recruit outside-of-the-district hires to make up a committee that deals with restorative justice. (AC7)

- Make a statement requiring existing extracurricular activities within the district to promote equity in their practices. (AC8)
- Seek out and recruit community members and trained professionals to make up committees pertaining to policy making within the district. (AC9)

Phase II: 6-9 Months

- Work with FEC and the Fairfield community to develop a document with resources for teachers to incorporate anti-racism into the current curriculum. (AC1)
- Update middle school programs (Character Education Program and Seventh Grade Anti-Bullying Program) to be more racially inclusive and informative. (AC3)
- Regularly schedule racial awareness and education programs for students (assemblies, guest speakers, workshops, etc.). (AC3)
- Supplement recruiting and hiring guidelines with a set of interview questions regarding cultural competency and a diversity focused recruiting guide. (AC4)
- Implement regular culturally affirming social-emotional learning programs for teachers. (AC6)

Phase III: 9-12 Months

- Communicate plans for curriculum change as each subject is reviewed and revised in accordance with the 2015-2024 Curriculum Renewal Calendar. (AC1)
- Guarantee that at least one professional is brought in every 6 months to conduct a seminar or period-structured instructional time on race, race education/consciousness, and/or diversity (and plan to extend this to every 4 months). (AC2)
- Hire BIPOC counselors and psychologists (and implement anti-racism and cultural competency training for current counselors). (AC6)
- Hire a restorative justice coordinator to facilitate and monitor disciplinary policies. (AC7)

Phase IV: 12-18 Months

- Develop a BIPOC teacher recruitment training for local and regional BOE members and/or relevant hiring officials. (AC4)
- Require a BIPOC educator recruitment and retention plan to be developed by local and regional BOEs to ensure proportional demographics of students to educators. (AC4)
- Require LEAs to submit and publish an annual report describing efforts to diversify their educator workforce and outcomes achieved. (AC4)
- Expand upon the TEAM program by including Black ERGs and EAPs. (AC4)
- Expand upon the teacher mortgage assistance program by supporting affordable housing. (AC4)
- Develop an intensive, trauma-informed program involving mental health practices. (AC6)

Phase V: 1-5 Years

- Eliminate the elementary gifted and talented program and extend the benefits and structuring of those programs such as better resources, tailored instruction, and collaborative environments, to all classes. (AC5)
- Remove middle school math tracking. (AC5)
- Create open enrollment for all high school classes. (AC5)
- Implement a requirement for narrative evaluations of student progress to be included on report cards and provide professional development surrounding these evaluations. (AC5)
- Remove weighted GPA. (AC5)

Funding

We recognize that a number of the Actionable Changes proposed necessitate changes in funding. To address this, below are some recommended funding mechanisms. We ask that the BOE engages in periodic future discussions of the district's budget with FEC in order to ensure that these Actionable Changes are being put into effect. Some Actionable Changes require more funding than others; the below section provides a brief overview of which changes, in our view, require more financial attention.

Actionable Changes That Require The Most Funding

The Actionable Change that would require the most funding is Actionable Change No. 6, which states that FPS' exclusionary disciplinary system should be reformed into a **restorative justice** system. Implementing this system would require the hiring of new **BIPOC** counselors and psychologists to provide affinity-based counseling, frequent **social-emotional learning** training for all counseling staff, the hiring of a restorative justice counselor, the conduction of an audit of the district's mental health programs by the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI), and the eventual development of an intensive, trauma-informed program involving mental health practices within FPS.

Actionable Changes Nos. 1, 7 and 9 require sizable funding as well. AC1 describes intensive curriculum reform that will likely require professional consultation, among other financial measures. AC7 explains the need for a restorative justice committee to offer an unbiased third-party perspective in all cases of discrimination within the district. AC9 states that the district should create a student and community oversight committee to incorporate student voices as well as diverse parent, educator, and community member voices within its policy decisions. It also urges the implementation of a permanent and diverse committee of relevant actors to develop future policy decisions relating to race and **equity**.

Furthermore, Actionable Change No. 8 stresses the importance of making all FPS extracurricular activities more equitable. In order for them to succeed, these clubs would need the financial support of the district to gain recognition, host events, and alter their practices. Additionally, it is important to create programs that partner with Bridgeport Public Schools, and these programs would require funding to be able to run.

Finally, Actionable Changes Nos. 2, 3, and 4 require funding. AC2 asks that the district hire professionals to conduct periodic race-related seminars and training sessions. AC3 asks that more assemblies and events are run relating to race and equity**.** Lastly, AC4 urges that the district hire more BIPOC staff and that they create a Minority Educator Recruitment and Retention Plan.

Potential Funding Mechanisms

FEC recognizes that many of the long term implementation measures in this report will require both time and funding. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent allocation of funds towards safely reopening schools, we understand that short term strategies may be the only attainable and affordable methods of implementation for the immediate school year. However, we aim to open a dialogue between the community and the BOE to collaborate on future implementation and budgeting of anti-racist policy in FPS.

According to the 2020-2021 budget report, FPS receives Title I, Part A funds from the federal government, which are used to "ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach" (U.S. DoEd, 2005). This can be accomplished through the implementation of various initiatives which align with the Actionable Changes in this report, such as "closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students" and "significantly elevating the quality of instruction by providing staff in participating schools with substantial opportunities for professional development" (U.S. DoEd, 2005). Some of the funding for the implementation of this report's Actionable Changes may come from the Title I funds that the BOE receives (FPS Budget Report, 2020-2021).

FPS also receives Title IV, Part A funds, which are used to provide students with a well rounded education and support safe and healthy students through "comprehensive school mental health, drug and violence prevention, training on trauma-informed practices, health and physical education" (Title IV-A). Funding for Actionable Changes Nos. 1, 2, 4, and 6 may come from the Title IV, Part A funds because they involve the development of a comprehensive, well rounded curriculum and the improvement of student mental health.

Outside of the school budget, there are local organizations committed to enhancing Fairfield's public education system that grant funds for educators. As another funding mechanism for the implementation of our Actionable Changes, educators can apply for a grant from the Fairfield Foundation for Education "for programs that enhance and enrich the curriculum in Fairfield's public schools" (Fairfield Foundation For Equity, 2020). Regarding Actionable Change No. 4, we recommend that the BOE looks into the Regional Education Service Center Minority Teacher Recruitment Alliance, which offers $300,000/year for initiatives on hiring BIPOC staff (RESC MTR, 2020). Additionally, fundraising from activities such as the music and arts festival mentioned in Actionable Change No. 3, can be used in part towards the implementation of additional anti-racism initiatives.

We recognize that these are only starting points; we cannot yet provide an exhaustive funding plan, but we eagerly await feedback from the BOE and are happy to research additional mechanisms with further guidance. Additionally, the committee proposed in Actionable Change No. 9 will include professionals who are better equipped to inform the district's decisions surrounding policy, budgeting, and funding of FEC's recommendations. If possible, FEC is also eager to be included in and offer further research and support in future discussions of the district's budget so as to help imagine how to make implementation of these Actionable Changes most feasible.

Accountability

It is imperative that there is regularly scheduled, monthly communication between BOE, FEC, and the general public about the content of this report; this communication will ensure that these Actionable Changes are being implemented, and offers the opportunity for the BOE to discuss progress, ask questions, address concerns, and request more research, if needed. This should be a continued collaboration. FEC cannot provide perfect solutions to the complex task of developing racial equity and we are eager to hear from the BOE and public about future steps.

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Final Conclusions

As was mentioned at the outset of this report, FEC in no way claims to offer perfect solutions to dismantling racism in all of its subtle and overt forms within FPS. Rather, these Actionable Changes – developed through extensive research of both national and local data – are meant to democratize the conversation amongst us, the community, and FPS leaders. To all community members and stakeholders, we invite you to share what you think we missed in this report, what we failed to consider, and what further research we can do to aid in finding mutually agreed upon solutions. To provide this welcomed feedback, please fill out our Report Feedback Form and/or email us to set up a Zoom meeting at fairfieldequitycoalition@gmail.com.

Though we recognize that there is and should be flexibility in the exact implementation of these ideas, FEC remains firmly committed to the overarching goal behind this report: to make FPS a place where *all* students, regardless of race, feel welcomed and appreciated, and are prepared for a life of continued learning and growth. In the long-term, we hope to push for equity broadly, in terms of gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, immigration status, economic status, political affiliation, and ability - race is just the beginning. Nevertheless, this core goal of an equitable school system remains strong in the minds and mission of our members – informed, concerned alumni of the FPS community – as well as the solicitous public represented in our surveys.

We understand the temptation to postpone this kind of work. Questions about funding sources, policy transformations, and even coming to terms with our own racial biases surely weigh heavy on any reader of this report, not to mention the additional uncertainty forced upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic. The difficult truth we all must eternalize, though, is that this work *cannot* wait. None of the district's goals are truly achievable if these reforms are not actualized. To wait means to neglect another class of BIPOC students, subjecting them to inequitable education and consequently implanting what could be a permanent sense of inferiority. To wait means our White students may be ill-equipped to enter our diverse world, harboring implicit biases and misconceptions of their fellow humans. To understand the importance of these reforms but not begin the long process of transforming how race is taught, appreciated, and understood in our school system is an entire dereliction of our educational responsibility to produce thoughtful, inquisitive, accepting, and anti-racist graduates of FPS.

This report was created over the span of 2020 by a coalition of volunteers who believe in FPS's commitment to hearing, uplifting, and serving its students. As current students and alumni of FPS, we are deeply grateful for the educational training provided to us by the district. We are not here to claim that our curricula and school infrastructure are broken beyond repair; rather, that our schools share a strong foundation on which we can collectively build a more inclusive, honest, and open environment. By putting these Actionable Changes into practice, FPS and the BOE will substantiate their public statements of harmony and acceptance with the infrastructure and mechanisms to actually achieve these ends, exemplifying the necessary and overdue transformative mission American public education must take towards anti-racism.

We sincerely thank you for your time and consideration, and look forward to advancing anti-racism and racial equity in partnership with FPS, the BOE, and Fairfield community.

Future Directions

Though this report is focused on racial equity, the framework is flexible in its application. The intention behind this report is that its findings will eventually be applied to any other equity issues that may be affecting FPS students in their learning environment. Power structures do not only affect the experiences of a community in one way – it is crucial that we acknowledge the importance of **intersectionality** in reforming the structure of the FPS system. Sustainable and inclusive change must come from a commitment to equity in *all* areas; not only race, but gender, class, religion, ability, sexual orientation, and any other identities that may be overlooked. In order to ensure this inclusivity, it is imperative that the FPS continues to utilize the framework of this report beyond racial equity efforts in the coming years.

In addition to ensuring an open mind to future equitable reform in the school system, it is also imperative to acknowledge that racial issues in Fairfield county cannot be solved solely through education, and we understand that as such there are issues that are outside the purview of the BOE. FEC has two committees that are researching these additional factors: Countywide Collaboration and Civic Engagement. The Countywide Collaboration committee has been working with similarly-oriented groups in Ridgefield and Darien with the hopes to eventually hold events, host conferences, and collaborate on reform using social media and web platforms. This committee has also been thinking of featuring local BIPOC artists in the Fairfield train stations to celebrate their work. The Civic Engagement committee has been working on organizing meetings with elected officials to keep them up to date on the work FEC is doing and get their signatures. Going forward, this committee will be formulating action plans on how to work with each of these elected officials.

The future success of FEC relies not only on the commitment of its members, but on the commitment of our community to demand change. If we continue to work together to ensure equity for all identities in Fairfield, we will be that much closer to realizing an accepting, culturally-competent, and harmonious community. We look forward to expanding our efforts to reach this end.

Appendix

Appendix I: Breakdown of survey responses regarding which histories need to be taught more in FPS Classrooms.

Black history (43), Indigenous history (30), LGBTQ history (16), African history (12), Asian/Asian-American history [specifically including Japanese internment] (10), women's/feminist history (7), Jewish history (4) [Holocaust and otherwise] and minority/POC history in general (15)

Appendix II: Examples and helpful articles about the historical weaponization of Science against Black Americans

The economic fall-out of the Tulsa Race Massacre, the inhumane treatment of Black men in the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment (Newkirk, 2016), Black women in gynecological research (Holland, 2018), racial disparities in the impacts of Covid-19 (Oppel Jr. et al, 2020), **environmental racism** (Newkirk, 2018), the science behind and human impacts of the Flint water crisis (Denchak, 2018), the Keystone Pipeline oil spill (Barrera, 2017), among others.

Appendix III: NEA Resources (Training resources for teachers)

Training programs through the National Education Association (NEA) *all with FPS (Smoler, 2019)
- Cultural Competence Training (NEA, 2014). Contact Anthony Brisson: abrisson@nea.org / (202) 822-7147
- Diversity Training (NEA, 2014). Contact Hilario Benzon: hbenzon@nea.org / (202) 822-7295
- Safety, Bias, and LGBTQ Issues Training (NEA, 2013). Contact Anthony Brisson: abrisson@nea.org / (202) 822-7147
- Social Justice Training (NEA, 2014). Contact Anthony Brisson: abrisson@nea.org / (202) 822-7147

Appendix IV: A list of training options and helpful organizations on preparing educators for inclusive and anti-racist instruction.

The Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning (CCRTL, 2015)
The goal of this organization is to create teachers and administrators who are practitioners of culturally responsive teaching and learning through professional development, school/district development, and community development.

Center for Racial Justice in Education (Center For Racial Justice, 2020)
This organization offers trainings, consultation, and in-depth partnerships to educators, schools, and educational organizations who want to advance racial justice. The trainings provide educators with a framework to understand the context, history, and manifestations of racism, as well as tools to build an anti-racist practice.

Teaching Tolerance (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020)

This organization provides free resources to educators for grades K-12. The materials can be used to supplement the curriculum, to inform teaching practices, and to create civil and inclusive school communities. Teaching Tolerance provides learning modules, presentations, and hands-on workshops. These resources help K–12 leaders shape their schools into strong, equitable communities.

Appendix V: A Grade By Grade list of books that amplify BIPOC voices.

Primary (K-2)
- *Something Happened in Our Town by* Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, Ann Hazzard, Donald Moses
- *A Chair For My Mother* by Vera Williams
- *Chocolate Milk, Por Favor* by Maria Dismondy and Nancy Raines Day
- *Can I Touch Your Hair?: Poems of Race, Mistakes, and Friendship* by Charles Waters and Irene Latham
- *A Big Mooncake For Little Star* by Grace Lin
- *Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal
- *I Am Enough* by Grace Byers

Upper Elementary (3-5)
- *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan
- *The Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* by Bette Bao Lord
- *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis
- *Eagle Song* by Joseph Bruchac
- *Return to Sender* by Julia Alvarez
- *One Crazy Summer* by Rita Williams-Garcia
- *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor

Middle School
- *The New Kid* by local author Jerry Craft
- *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas
- *Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes
- *The Ship We Built* by Lexie Bean
- *Can You See Me* by Libby Scott and Rebecca Westcott
- *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang

High School
- *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone
- *Juliet Takes A Breath* by Gabby Rivera
- *Ahisma* by Supriya Kelkar
- *Etched In Clay: The Life of Dave, Enslaved Potter and Poet* by Andrea Cheng
- *All The Stars Denied* by Guadalupe Garcia McCall
- *I Am Alfonso Jones* by Tony Medina

AppendixVI: A list of assemblies and guest speakers that amplify BIPOC voices.

Elementary Schools
- Invite local Norwalk artist and author 5IVEFINGAZ to read and speak about his book *Love More Than Ever: The Little Book of Big Love* ([Love More Than Ever, 2019](#)).
- Invite local author Jerry Craft ([AuhtorsOnTheWeb, 2020](#)) to speak about his book *New Kid*. The sequel will be coming out this fall.

Middle Schools
- Inviting anti-racism or liberation activists from the past or present to speak.
- Inviting a member of the BIPOC community who also identifies as queer or disabled for example to speak on intersectional oppression and identity. It is vital to continue to diversify students' experiences by introducing students to these types of individuals.

High Schools
- Inviting a speaker to explain how nonprofits and grassroots organizations function and are maintained.
- Inviting an expert on the topic of media literacy to teach students to move beyond the textbook and to challenge what they are taught and seek dissenting opinions.
- Holding an assembly for high school seniors that explains America's voting process. Voter registration forms can also be made available for those eligible.
- Showing films such as *The Hate U Give*, *13th*, *Selma*, *42*, *Harriet*, *Just Mercy*, *Moonlight* and *If Beale Street Could Talk* would enhance students' understanding of historical racism and discrimination and invite them to engage in conversations involving marginalized groups in the present.

Appendix VII: Field trip suggestions.

Prudence Crandall Museum, the Institute for American Indian Studies, the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, performances at a venue such as National Black Theatre or New Federal Theatre, and dance performances such as an Alvin Ailey production.

Appendix VIII: List of open positions in FPS as of September 2020 ([Frontline Education, 2020](#)).

- *Teacher/Long Term Sub* → CT Certification in Subject
- *Curriculum Coordinator* → Tenured Teacher in the Department (CT 092 Certification Preferred)
- *Teacher Substitutes - All Levels* → None Listed
- *Coach - High School* → CT Coaching Permit
- *Director of Communications* → Minimum of a Bachelor's degree in Language Arts, Communications, Public Relations, Marketing, or a related field. A minimum of five (5) years in a position in Public Relations, Marketing, or a related field. Experience in a school district is preferred.
- *Administrative Secretary II - Human Resources* → The skills and knowledge required would generally be acquired with graduation from high school and three years of responsible secretarial

or clerical experience or an equivalent combination of education and experience (computer and secretarial skills, strong organizational skills, good interpersonal skills).
- *Paraprofessional Substitutes* → Earned a minimum of 60 college credits or earned a minimum of an Associate's degree or a passing score on the ParaPro Assessment.

Appendix IX: A list of hiring strategies to mitigate the effects of implicit bias.

- Providing unconscious/implicit bias and diversity training to personnel who serve on hiring committees
- Prioritizing cultural responsiveness as a factor in the hiring process
- Crafting applications to communicate that cultural responsiveness is important to your district
- Requiring hiring committees to write explanations for why they are or are not recommending each candidate for hire
- Relying on a structured interview that standardizes the process among candidates, eliminating much subjectivity. These interviews pose the same set of questions (Cullinan, 2017) in the same order to all candidates, allowing clearer comparisons between them

Boston Public Schools can serve as a reference for an example hiring process (Teach Boston, 2019), and the CT Guidebook for Hiring and Selection offers a list of guiding interview questions (CSDE, 2018)

To fund these changes, FPS can look into the Regional Education Service Center Minority Teacher Recruitment (RESC MTR) Alliance, which offers $300,000/year for initiatives like this.

Appendix X: Strategies on how to not "teach to the test."

- Let more experienced teachers mentor younger educators on how to prevent an emphasis on standardized testing by using examples that emphasize education on more broad topics
- Create unique, interactive and engaging lessons that encourage students to go past the standardized test, and think more deeply about what they are learning
- Emphasize critical thinking against simple answers: students should go off on their own and learn to find their own path, while a teacher serves as a guide (LSUS, 2016).

Appendix XI: Tips for teachers on developing student agency.

- Instead of leading a student through a specific lesson, set goals for them, and let them try to reach the goals on their own
- Instruct the student to frequently reflect on the progress towards their goals, and what they can do to get closer to these goals
- Help students create new goals and instruct them on what they might've missed in the last goal (Poon, 2018)

Appendix XII: Research on SEL programming and the short-term and long-term effects have included the following results:

• 27% more students improve their academic performance
at the end of the program;
• 57% more gain in their skills levels;
• 24% more improved social behaviors and lower levels of distress;
• 23% more improved attitudes; and
• 22% more showed fewer conduct problems.

Appendix XIII: Tips and guides on implementing Restorative Justice in FPS classrooms.

Wendi Cooper at Operation Restoration (Operation Restoration, 2020), Fania Davis at Restorative Justice of Oakland Youth (Davis, 2017), and Mark Chapman at Fordham University (Fordham University, 2020), detailed guides taken from successful district initiatives (e.g. Oakland Unified School District's Restorative Justice Implementation Guide (Yusem, et, al. 2020), Education Votes Schoolwide Restorative Practices Guide (Advancement Project, 2017), and Mindful Schools' guide (Yusem, 2019)), and coordinators of restorative justice (e.g. Maxine Getz at Center for Court Innovation (Getz, 2020), Carlette Marie Quinto at Center for Court Innovation (Quinto, 2020), the Vera Institute (Vera, 2020), and Edutopia (Davis, 2014).

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