

West Hartford Public School District

Agenda Item: Curriculum Through the Lens of Equity

Meeting Date: February 7, 2017

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Through: Tom Moore, Superintendent

Background

In 2016, the West Hartford Public Schools announced a multi-year commitment to building the cultural competence of its staff and students. Cultural competence is defined as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Cross et al., 1989; Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991). The establishment of an Equity and Diversity Council (EDC) chaired by the Director of Diversity Advancement signaled the district’s long-term commitment to developing a systemic approach to enhancing our policies, practices, and the teaching and learning process toward ensuring equitable opportunities and support for each and every student. The EDC has identified five working priorities aligned to these efforts:

- Increase diversity in WHPS certified staff
- Increase educator capacity for cultural proficiency in all areas of teaching and learning
- Increase student access and opportunities for engagement, leadership & achievement
- Enhance the Open Choice experience for all
- Engage families in the work of the EDC

A focus on cultural competence has emerged within school and department plans supported by district-wide professional learning. As we deepen our own understanding, we have begun to develop concrete steps along a multi-year pathway to ensure an equity lens permeates all aspects of the educational process. While we are in early stages, work is underway and this report will outline our district-wide efforts to build and support cultural competence through curricular connections, professional learning, and systemic structures that support and improve our collective capacity.

Curricular Connections

Increasing student access and opportunities for engagement, leadership, and achievement is accomplished, in part, through a close examination of the curriculum and the assurance that learning expectations are rigorous, relevant, and culturally responsive. Educational researchers, Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, identify four necessary conditions for culturally responsive teaching and learning:

- i. Establishing inclusion—creating a learning atmosphere in which students and teachers feel respected by and connected to one another
- ii. Developing attitude—creating a favorable disposition toward the learning experience through personal relevance and choice

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- iii. Enhancing meaning—creating challenging, thoughtful learning experiences that include student perspectives and values
- iv. Engendering competence—creating an understanding that students are effective in learning something they value

(Strengthening Student Engagement. *Educational Leadership*. September 1995. pp. 17-21)

Each of these conditions is essential and also sensitive to cultural differences. The content of the formal curriculum, as well as the pedagogical strategies utilized play significantly into how effective we are as a system at creating and sustaining these conditions. The focus of this section is to illustrate the current state of the curriculum as well as planned revisions that support establishing inclusion, developing attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering confidence by providing students with diverse perspectives to learn and interpret content through rigorous and relevant approaches to subject matter. Not surprisingly, the most tangible and thoughtful examples are found within the Humanities which lends itself to a more thematic approach to the content and the treatment of multiple and diverse perspectives.

Our PK-12 Social Studies curriculum presented its self-study to the Curriculum Council as part of the 5-year curriculum review process in the Spring of 2016. Vertical teams at both the PK-5 and 6-12 levels are engaged in the process of acting on findings of the self-study and feedback of the Council to shape and improve the overall program. The recent release and adoption of the CT Social Studies Frameworks (in February 2015) serves as the primary driver to curricular revision. Changes to our state frameworks provided guideposts for both the content and themes through which to deliver the curriculum. An examination of these frameworks through the lens of cultural competence has provided us with creative and meaningful ways to ensure equity through personal connection and relevance of content instructed. The full design and implementation of revisions is staggered over a period of 3-4 years. Highlights of some of the changes – as they relate to cultural competence – are explored below.

PK-12 Social Studies Mission

The purpose of history and social studies is to prepare students to ask and seek answers to meaningful questions and prepare them with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become informed participants in an ever-changing global community and to act responsibly to improve its condition.

At the elementary level, work this year in grades K-3 and planned revisions in grades 4-5 (summer 2017) focus on civics and geography. The two overarching goals for civics instruction are to: (i) develop an understanding of self, social standards and rules, along with the rights and responsibilities of citizens; and (ii) determine ways one can address problems individually and collectively to improve the communities to which we belong. Each of these goals has a series of developmental grade level standards associated with them. For example, in grade 1 the curriculum includes activities to enable students to describe themselves as an individual member of groups (i.e. recognize the unique characteristics of their own family), describe attributes of self and others including relevant cultural characteristics of self, and recognize and express likes, dislikes, needs and wants in a manner acceptable to school norms. Suggested activities related to students' descriptions of self (establishing inclusion) include writing and drawing activities regarding "what makes them a superhero," morning meeting activities regarding meeting someone new, and other activities highlighting attributes of self and family. Lessons and materials related to describing relevant cultural characteristics of self-include formal lessons teaching students how they are alike and different, how differences can create positive relationships, and how to respect one another's unique qualities. The curriculum further defines mentor texts (see figure at left) that teachers may incorporate into direct instruction, guided or independent reading related to the themes of developing a positive self-concept, developing positive interpersonal relationships, understanding rules and responsibilities within communities, and identifying, understanding, and regulating emotions of self and others. Mentor texts used to support our writing units are specifically selected to highlight characters from a

Sample mentor text for teaching celebrating of differences

The Sandwich Swap written by Queen Rania of Jordan

Video text produced by Zaid Bawab

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvEr6FsVoBI>

range of diverse ethnic backgrounds. [One Plastic Bag](#) is one such example from within informational writing in grade 3. It highlights the story of Isatou Ceesay dubbed the “Queen of Recycling in The Gambia,” who while growing up in a village in West Africa, observed goats dying from eating plastic bags and acted to lead a recycling effort to make handbags and other materials from the refuse. The text won the Eureaka! Honor Award for nonfiction from the California State Reading Association and supports not only the depiction of diversity within curricular materials, but the celebration of contributions of real-world persons of color on real-world issues. It provides for a strong connection to the inquiry arc, a foundational design element for the teaching of social studies in which students learn to: (i) develop questions and plan inquiries; (ii) apply disciplinary tools and concepts; (iii) evaluate sources and use evidence; and (iv) communicate solutions and take informed action. This story identifies how a West African villager takes informed action to address an environmental issue.

The CT Frameworks outline specific themes across grade levels that drive the sequence of content instructed. Grades K-2 focus mainly on civics, citizenship, and role in society. Grade 3 has a focus on United States geography which will provide for connections to regional cultural differences. Grade 4 features a focus on Connecticut and local history which will provide us opportunities to investigate the diverse range of historical figures who have contributed to our local culture and heritage. Grade 5 focuses on early United States history which offers connections to examining history through the varied perspectives of colonists, Native Americans, and slaves. One example currently in practice is a grade 5 assured learning experience in which, after a block of instruction, students are assigned a colonial identity and are asked to write a journal entry from the point of view of that character that expresses their thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions to daily experiences of the time period. One example of planned activities based on work not yet completed but underway relates to the identification and study of figures from diverse backgrounds who have made contributions the local community. To that end, Ashley Callan, our town-wide curriculum specialist, has partnered with Kari Nicewander, a Whiting Lane parent to engage the larger community to identify such figures, and identify or develop age-appropriate learning resources aligned to curricular goals. The group has researched and identified 12 persons of color, both contemporary and historical, and posted resource materials on an internal district [webpage](#) to promote research and instruction around a diverse group of local figures. The callout (at right) provides a few examples of the figures identified and their contributions to local history. Another exciting partnership involves WHPS’ connection to [Connecticut Explored](#), an online magazine and educational resource dedicated to documenting the depth and breadth of our state’s history. *Connecticut Explored* approached Ashley Callan and a partner teacher from Simsbury to commission a student-friendly history text (*e-book*) for grades 3-5. Ashley sought to include a chapter on Native Americans and to that end, drafted some materials and sent them to a contact within the Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation. The Pequots were uncomfortable having any documentation of their history authored by a person whose perspective was not authentic and as a result, Ashley was able to secure a partnership with the Pequots in which they will pen a chapter from essentially a first-person perspective. The outcome of this partnership will drive additional revision and enhancement to our curriculum in the form of lessons and assured learning experiences that blend content with an appreciation for cultural differences and multiple perspectives. More importantly, the partnerships provide evidence and concrete examples for both students and staff as to how collaborative relationships can foster meaningful and positive change for individuals and an organization.

Joseph Cinque (1814-1879) was a West African man who was kidnapped and managed to gain control of the slave ship the *Amistad*. He fought for his freedom on the ship, and later in a court in Connecticut. He won the right to return to Africa.

Maria Sanchez (1926-1989) worked to make sure that there would be education available in Spanish in the Hartford Public Schools, founded the Puerto Rican Parade, and made sure that Puerto Rican voices were heard in the Hartford area. She was the first Latina woman elected to the Connecticut legislature.

The work in PK-5 is far from complete and the PK-5 Vertical Team has developed a 4-year timeline for ongoing curricular revisions. Much of the work planned for the next 3 years involves unit writing in the upper grades and revision of English language arts units to feature explicit interdisciplinary connections to social studies. One such example is planned for grade 3 in which the ELA curriculum focuses on fairy tales and folktales. We see this as an opportunity to feature Native American folktales and thereby integrate some social studies content and lessons to accompany the unit (as well as bolster a lens of cultural competence). A

review of classroom libraries with a specific lens on literary (fictional) texts that feature diversity of characters and perspectives is also planned. Work is ongoing, however, the examples above illustrate not only our progress to date but our commitment to finding meaningful connections within the curriculum.

At the secondary level, the social studies program outlines content within a defined pathway. Grades 6 and 7 provide a comprehensive treatment of regional studies. Grade 8 focuses on early American history up to and through the Civil War. Grade 9 provides a survey approach to contemporary modern world history and the focus of grade 10 is a survey of United States history. Upperclassmen electives within grades 11 and 12 allow for a more in-depth study within a regional or themed focus. With the release of the new CT Frameworks, there is a shift of emphasis from content (history) to social studies (themes). While the outline of content has not dramatically shifted, the instructional approach taken has undergone significant revision. One of the more prominent themes is that of “sense of place” in which teachers seek to develop students’ understanding of where people are in the world and learn about the interactions of a people with their environment and other peoples. Related to this theme, one outcome beyond academic skills is to build student capacity for empathy and understanding. Through instruction that blends content with cultural competence, teachers seek to develop learners that recognize the value of human dignity and the worth of all people. Another theme worthy of mention is that of taking informed action. Assured learning experiences at the secondary level include capstone experiences and the development of community action portfolios that teach students the importance of being active as well as informed citizens armed with the ability to appreciate multiple perspectives. These themes, coupled with the core academic skill of producing a well-written argument based on a claim (perspective) and supported by evidence (content), provide for a comprehensive and well-rounded program.

Our middle years’ treatment of world regional studies (grades 6 and 7) focuses on middle America and the Caribbean. One area of emphasis is immigration and migration patterns and the environmental and cultural reasons why people choose to move. An assured learning experience related to this theme is for students to interview an immigrant or someone who migrated from one region to another and compare personal reflections to themes and concepts discussed in class. Students are asked to apply their learning of content and culture within a realistic setting. After studies of individual regions, environmental conditions and developing an understanding of how where people live influences how they live, students engage in a role-playing scenario in which they act as delegates from a variety of different countries and are asked whether or not they would support forming a union and why. At the end of grade 7, all students engage in a capstone project in which they examine an issue that has impact on more than one region, engage in problem solving and generate possible solutions or strategies to influence the issue at hand. This focus is revisited in 9th grade within Modern World History. What had traditionally been a Eurocentric / western civilization course has undergone revision to include the Latin-American revolutions and a greater emphasis on Africa. A theme highlighting the experiences of the indigenous peoples before, during, and after European imperialism forms a lens that contributes to cultural competence. Students who uncover specific interests may pursue more in-depth studies of the history and culture of specific regions within upperclassmen electives.

US History is the focus of grades 8 and 10. Programming provides students with an appreciation of the diversity of perspectives among the various groups that populate the American stage during our country’s history. Within 8th grade, students study the relations between European settlers and native populations and the treatment of native peoples (Trail of Tears, forced relocation) and slaves. Students learn about these issues reading historical accounts from the various sides of an issue (such as interviews with relocated peoples as well as officers charged with moving people; slave accounts, newspaper accounts of slave uprisings, excerpts of the writing of figures such as Frederick Douglas and Solomon Northup, etc.). Study culminates with a formal research paper on a topic of the student’s choosing. Study in grade 10 is approached with a focus on social history and the lens of “the other.” This translates into studying historical events through the lens of the American women when studying the suffrage movement or through the lens of black Americans when studying civil rights. The recent change to the Advanced Placement US History course to a more

thematic social history lens (vs memorization of facts), has helped to support and bolster changes within the 10th grade survey course. Further revisions are planned to more fully develop this theme across the course. US History from the African American Experience (USAAE) has been in existence as an alternative to the standard grade 10 course at Conard for many years and has been recently added to Hall as well. This course is structured to cover the same content across the same basic units of study but uses a greater number of sources from black authors and provides additional emphasis on black culture and the contributions of black Americans. For example, USAAE provides additional time and emphasis to the study of poet Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance (rise of jazz music, painting and poets within black American culture). US History highlights MLK and Malcolm X whereas USAAE will provide greater depth of study and introduce students to additional figures such as Richard Wright, a black communist from the early 1940s. Regardless of the course, the theme of social history and the study of diverse perspectives is evident throughout the study of US history.

Elective courses offer students dramatic choice to grow their capacity for cultural competence while investigating areas of personal interest. Genocide Studies, in its maiden year, undertakes the study of 20th century global history, the concept of genocide and major historical events (e.g., the Holocaust, Rwanda, Darfur, killing fields in Cambodia, etc.). Human Rights begins with a student of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its impact on the contemporary world. Topics can include the human condition in Syria, the historical use and current implications of landmines, etc. WHPS partners with the Dodd Center at the University of Connecticut and will pilot curricular revisions that offer students ECE credit. Modern Africa and the Middle East is running at Hall after a long absence. Formerly focused on South Africa, this course has been revamped to highlight more contemporary issues within the Middle East, Syria, the Arab-Israeli conflict, etc. Latin American Studies (formerly Hispanic Studies) is being offered as an elective for 2017-18 at both schools. This broad survey course will feature two texts: *Harvest of the Empire*, by Juan Gonzalez; and *Latino Americans*, by Ray Suarez (PBS news correspondent). Anthropology provides a focus on gender roles across different cultures. Sociology defines the various elements of culture and studies the characteristics of various groups.

Interdisciplinary connections to social studies further support the lens of cultural competence within our curriculum. Examples within English language arts include a unit of study centering around historical fiction connected to the theme of “The Human Experience.” Students engage in research and produce some form of a product (e.g. research paper, performance, presentation, etc.) to document their learning about experiential and cultural similarities and differences of people within our global community. A listing of sample fictional texts that students may choose among is at right. The grade 8 ELA curriculum features a unit titled, “Lessons from the Past” featuring Holocaust texts and targeting a cross-curricular connection

to the study of WWII within social studies. Outside the classroom, our Library Media program is engaged in the ongoing work of building a library collection that reflects the diversity in our district. Jeri Van Leer, Department Supervisor for Library Media, leverages the home language report in order to manage the district collection and ensure access to bilingual texts in our most prominent languages other than English. Library Media Specialists are also charged with updating and broadening collections to include greater representation of authors, illustrators, texts with main characters or storylines that reflect diversity relative to heritage and ethnic background, geographical location, sexual orientation, family dynamic, and other factors. Visual and Performing Arts also contribute to students’ appreciation of other cultures through themed instruction aligned to social studies content. The K-8 General Music curriculum provides emphasis on a diverse repertoire of music having origins from all parts of the world in order to expose students to a variety of rhythms, sounds, and styles of music. Within middle school, grades 6 and 7 music classes emphasize music from within the countries under study in the regional studies pathway. One example of an assured learning experience in grade 7 is a unit on African American spirituals that lead up to a

Holocaust Texts

Diary of Anne Frank
by Anne Frank

Boy in the Striped Pajamas
by John Boyne

Prisoner B4807
by Alan Gratz

Titles representing World Regions

Shooting Kabul - Afghanistan

Taste of Salt - Haiti

Red Umbrella - Cuba

Out of Bounds - South Africa

Boys Without Names - India

Crossing the Wire - Mexico

focus on the Jazz Age. Ensemble performances both feature and emphasize world music and pieces are regularly performed in the native language. At the high school level, the Gospel Choir course has evolved to become Voices of the World in order to both feature and attract a wider and more diverse lens of music and performer. Visual Arts has a specific focus on lesser represented artists and art forms within its curriculum. This takes the form of study of Aboriginal Art, Graffiti Art, glass blowing, hip hop artists, and much more. In addition, students in primary grades learn about art forms specific to cultural regions based on an alignment to regions of study within the historical social studies curriculum. [With the change to our existing social studies framework, work is planned to realign interdisciplinary connections between arts and social studies.] Assured learning experiences within art provide students outlets to not only express themselves as individuals, but also to highlight and share their background and culture. One such example is personal narrative carousel project in which students design a drawing of a carousel horse that features expression of their culture and heritage. The individual pieces are combined into a class collection that then reflects the diversity of experience of the class. A recent art show reflected pieces student artists created aligned to the theme of human rights. Another collection reflected the theme of diversity in which students blended facial features of four separate figures. Visual and Performing Arts represent curricular areas very clearly connected to not only personal expression but group culture. Exposure and performance in a wide range of diverse genres provides our students with invaluable experiences that grow their cultural competence and broadens their perspectives.



- K *** Colors and Shapes/Piet Mondrian, Grandma Moses/Leo Lionni/Mexican Art
- 1 *** Self Portraits/Mary Cassatt/Henri Rousseau/Eric Carle/ African Art
- 2 *** Figure Drawing/Romare Bearden/Paul Klee/Claude Monet/Japanese Art
- 3 *** Soft Sculpture Fish/Color Theory/Vincent Van Gogh/Henri Matisse/ Alexander Calder/Native American Art
- 4 *** Carousel Horses/Georges Seurat/Georgia O'Keeffe/Optical Art
- 5 *** Pop Art/Surrealism/Andy Warhol/Pablo Picasso/ Rene Magritte

Through a broad array of courses and a themed approach to deliver content while emphasizing the diverse perspective of those impacted, our district programming serves to establish inclusion, develop attitude, enhance meaning and engender competence thereby providing a culturally responsive treatment to the study of our world.

Professional Learning

The West Hartford Public Schools is committed to developing a culturally competent body of faculty and staff members, centered on building knowledge and skills to effectively serve students from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Attainment of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors intended to increase our capacity for cultural competence is supported through ongoing professional learning experiences. In alignment with the tenants of the Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning, our focus on cultural competence, provides opportunities for our educators to learn through engagement in a myriad of professional learning structures grounded in theories and practices of adult, organizational and workplace learning. The CT State Department of Education (CSDE) defines high quality professional learning for cultural competence as “professional learning that enhances both educator practice and outcomes for each and every student facilitates educators’ self-examination of their awareness, knowledge, skills, and actions that pertain to culture and how they can develop culturally-responsive strategies to enrich the educational experiences for all students.” (May 2015).

We subscribe to the premise that high-quality cultural competence professional development is ongoing, experiential, and collaborative. Further, our focus must be closely connected to working with students and understanding their culture. This assertion is based on the belief that students and their life histories and experiences should be placed at the center of teaching and learning. Essentially, it is imperative that the school staff has a great capacity for culturally responsive pedagogy, supported by a culturally relevant

curriculum. Our focus this year on *Building Our Cultural Competence* is the beginning of a multi-year plan to create safe spaces for professional learning experiences that derive from exploration of multiple perspectives, experiences and contributions of diverse cultures, individuals and groups. Short term and longitudinal evaluation measures are utilized and will be further developed to assess the quality, effectiveness and overall impact of our aim. We seek to create educational environments where inclusion and respect are promoted and modeled. Moreover, our measures will evaluate the extent to which our work serves as a vehicle to raise the achievement of all students, while eliminating gaps between highest and lowest performing student groups.

During Fall 2016, over 750 of our educators engaged in district-wide and building-level professional learning experiences that focused on diversity-related topics. On October 5th, secondary level educators participated in a two-hour Curriculum and Staff Improvement (CSI) session to lay the foundation for *Building Cultural Competence*. On October 11th, elementary school educators engaged in a full day of professional development activities which grounded our cultural competence work, assessed our school-based cultural competence needs and examined how the K-5 Civics Framework aligns with our work and supports our school communities. To kick off both days, Superintendent Tom Moore opened each session with a presentation of *Who We Are* as a district. He highlighted the demographic and cultural changes we have seen across the district over the past fifteen years. These significant changes signal a need for us to examine and strengthen our systems for understanding our students' cultures and institutionalizing this knowledge in ways that what we teach is culturally relevant and how we teach is culturally responsive. To chart the course for our long-term plan, three guest speakers, through a community partnership with the University of Saint Joseph (USJ), shared their personal experiences and scholarly expertise to frame the rationale for why a cultural competence lens is critical. Guest speaker, Dr. Enrique Sepúlveda, illustrated culturally responsive practice as “a process that begins with authentic relationships and spaces for community formation, where life experiences, perspectives and analysis of those on the margins are critical starting points to individual and social transformation. This kind of unity and solidarity implies a deep sense of empathy, where one's full humanity, dignity and common personhood are affirmed.” The plenary session by Superintendent Moore and USJ guest speakers was followed by a small group debrief break-out session facilitated by district-wide educators identified as ‘change agents’.

Building cultural competence is a complex developmental process that evolves over an extended period of time across a continuum. The district's early release Wednesday CSI calendar provides dedicated time throughout the year for deeper building-level focus on equity and diversity topics. The Cultural Competence Continuum is a framework used to guide our professional learning. The continuum recognizes that our educators, as individuals and collective school groups, are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills. The three overlapping stages along the continuum are defined as: Cultural Consciousness- understanding of one's own cultural identity, bias, prejudices and experiences of both privilege and marginalization; Cultural Responsiveness-commitment to the continuous improvement of skills, knowledge and personal growth needed to establish meaningful connection with people from various cultural backgrounds; Cultural Advocacy- lifelong commitment to action that supports equity in each school community. Empowers children and staff to be social justice advocates. (Cross T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Isaacs, M., 1989).

Building-level professional development offerings throughout the year have been tailored to the identified needs of each school, and by design, have allowed teacher input about equity and diversity topics of interest and relevance. At several schools, professional development activities have incorporated some form of a needs assessment relevant to cultural competence and largely focused on cultural consciousness. For

example, Project Implicit is an online interactive assessment conducted at the building level. Project Implicit allows test takers to examine their own attitudes and beliefs on a variety of cultural, diversity and differences topics. This tool provides a “virtual laboratory” for collecting data and provides feedback to the participant. While some schools have identified a single topic on which to focus more deeply throughout the year, other schools have introduced multiple topics through a self-directed choice model. On December 21, 2016, the three middle schools collaborated to offer multiple workshops in which our own educators and outside presenters facilitated professional learning activities. For example, guest presenters from Integrated Refugee & Immigration Services (IRIS) facilitated an interactive workshop titled, *How They Got Here: Diversity in Refugee and Immigrant Experiences*. *The Hallway Workshop: Meeting Families Where They Are* was facilitated by an urban city school educator who is also a WHPS parent. Other professional development offerings and topics included LGBTQ, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Family Engagement, just to name a few. The high schools have incorporated student voices during their cultural competence CSI sessions. From pre-recorded student accounts of their lived experiences, to student-led workshops at the high school level, teacher evaluation feedback reflected tremendous value in deriving learning from student voices and connecting their work with students’ backgrounds. Elementary schools engaged their faculty and staff in experiential learning activities such as the Privilege Walk, Cultural BINGO and Bio-Culture Poems, coupled with small group dialogue, individual reflection and collaborative planning based on practical take-aways. All schools will continue to utilize teachers’ variety experiences as future learning opportunities.

Open Choice Professional Learning and Supports

WHPS has observed and experienced a positive impact on our district and community as a result of our 50 years of participation in the Open Choice program (formerly called Project Concern). Students of different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds bring different points of view that provide opportunities for robust dialogue and debate. In the classroom, athletic field, on the performance stage and in the community, the interactions and relationships between students and families across backgrounds have promoted understanding of racial and cultural differences that exist among us. Integrated and diverse school experiences foster critical thinking skills that are increasingly important in our society. WHPS continues to examine and organize its systems, practices, and policies to promote awareness, inclusion and equity that foster academic and social success.

Last year, through the Open Choice Book Club, 20 WHPS teachers and administrators read the book *Culturally Relevant Teaching: Theory, Research & Practice* by Dr. Geneva Gay and participated in 3 one-hour after school group discussions co-facilitated by CREC’s Institute of Teaching and Learning and the Hartford Region. In addition to the valuable conversations related to creating high-achieving schools that address the needs of diverse learners, participants participated in a two-day *Social Justice and Equity in Action Symposium*. This year, 30 WHPS teachers, administrators and members of the EDC, along with our Open Choice Family Engagement Consultant participate in two book clubs. Participants are currently reading *New Ways to Engage Parents; Strategies and Tools for Teachers and Leaders K-12* by Dr. Patricia A. Edwards and discussing existing and potentially new approaches to partnering with families tailored to their school’s district’s context. Book club members are working with CREC facilitators to help build capacity to lead the coordination of the implementation of the Book Club’s plan for engaging parents, through the lens of equity. Several members of the book club and the EDC attended the Open Choice Equity and Diversity Summit in the fall and will attend a February professional learning session on “telling stories” to engage with families and communities.

System Structures

The ongoing work of building our district capacity for cultural competence and enhancing both our curriculum and professional learning is supported through a number of district-wide structures that engage stakeholders from all angles of the work. Relative to the specific work of cultural competence, the Equity and Diversity Council is the prominent and primary working group to provide vision and leadership to collective efforts. Second only by way of differences in the specificity of focus, our Professional Learning and

Evaluation Committee is also charged with reviewing and evaluating our collective practices and making recommendations for change. Other internal district structures such as Curriculum Council, our ESOL Outreach Coordinator, the various school development plans also contribute to our strategic efforts. Community partnerships are another significant ingredient to the sustainment and enhancement of efforts. Notable partnership that weigh on curriculum through the lens of equity include our *One Book, One Town* program, home-stay and foreign exchange programs, the Open Choice program, partnerships with Solomon Schechter, and grant projects undertaken in collaboration with The Bridge, the Graustein Memorial Fund, the Foundation for WHPS, and other community partners. A short descriptions of the major efforts of each is provided to give evidence of how the work is crafted, carried out and will be sustained over the course of years.

Equity and Diversity Council

In an effort to ensure that educators have a decisive voice at every stage of improvement planning of systemic practices, programs and policies, the Equity and Diversity Council (EDC) convenes monthly meetings and also interacts through online platforms. The membership of the EDC is comprised of faculty and staff representatives from all WHPS schools, coupled with the participation of parents and partnering community agencies. There are five EDC subcommittees that engage in action group work at the building and district levels. The subcommittees are established as: Ethnic Affairs Committee, LGBTQ Advisory, Advancing Student Achievement and Educator Capacity-building, Parent Outreach and Family Engagement. The Ethnic Affairs Committee is a local level action workgroup of the Connecticut Association of Education (CEA) which serves to recruit, support and sustain teachers of racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. Further, the Ethnic Affairs Committee seeks to encourage and support the inclusion of teachers in dialogue and social justice advocacy. The LGBTQ Advisory was established four years ago to support staff and has evolved to focus on staff development, curriculum development and increasing parent awareness. The Student Achievement and Educator Capacity-building subcommittee is dedicated to growing the knowledge and competence of teachers, and developing a culturally responsive mindset that foster increased and equitable student access and opportunities for engagement, leadership and achievement. The Open Choice subcommittee strives to increase community awareness about the school choice integration program and engage stakeholders in work to enhance the quality of the program for all. The Open Choice subcommittee works in collaboration with the Parent Engagement subcommittee and is currently conducting a review and analysis of the 2016 Open Choice Needs Assessment. The merger of these two subcommittees work to identify and share research and best practices on family engagement, and to inform school and district planning and implementation of those best practices.

EDC monthly meetings take place in Town Hall and are open to all faculty, staff and community members. Meetings are publicized through the WHPS website, *Connections* newsletter, district-wide staff email, WHPS Staff Bulletin and through the *Equity and Diversity in Action* Google Community. During meetings, the membership collects, examines and determines the distribution of resources to appropriate groups which can be leveraged during a curriculum revision process. Through the Student Achievement and Educator Capacity-Building subcommittee and the Library Media Services department, the EDC maintains a growing district clearinghouse of current articles, literature, studies and reports relevant to building cultural competence. These resources are made available to the various professional learning groups and curriculum writing and revision teams.

Professional Learning and Evaluation Committee (PLEC)

The PLEC is a committee of teachers and administrators representing all schools, academic disciplines, and roles across the district. The purpose of the PLEC is to serve as a formal structure to inform and advise the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction in order to support systemic continuous improvement and teacher professional growth and development. The PLEC supports the development of our Curriculum and Staff Improvement (CSI) calendar and the priorities within our professional learning and district development plans. The PLEC affirmed the broad goal of cultural competence and as a district we are leveraging this group to not only program professional learning opportunities within our district calendar

but also grow the capacity of teacher leaders for the work across the district through formal professional development opportunities.

Curriculum Council

Our Curriculum Council made up of a vertical team of curriculum and instructional leaders, serves as a body of experts called upon to support the peer review of curricular and related service program areas formal 5-year self-studies. Departments and programs undergo curriculum review in which they conduct a comprehensive self-assessment grounded in established indicators and benchmark descriptions of performance. In order to better support a district focus on cultural competence, the Curriculum Council has reviewed and revised its set of indicators to ensure the lens of equity and diversity is explicitly represented as a component of the curriculum review process and embedded within the definition of a high quality curriculum

Community Partnerships

The William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund recently awarded the district a \$50,000 Inspiring Equity grant through December, 2017. The grant project, *We All Have a Story to Tell: Inspiring Equity Through Community Conversations*, builds upon collaborative community partnerships, particularly with the Bridge Family Center's Family Resource Center and Great by 8. *We All Have a Story to Tell* will engage a Dialogue Team of school and community members, many of whom represent organizations such as the West Hartford Public Libraries, The Bridge Family Resource Center and Hello! West Hartford who are also invested in issues of leadership, equity, and community dialogue. The project will develop and use a common model for convening school and community groups to share their stories and hear others' stories, with opportunity to record/document their stories. Students, educators, and community members will engage in this dialogue within safe spaces with trained facilitators who enable inclusive, constructive, and respectful community conversation and active listening.

Partnership with Solomon Schechter

In honor of Martin Luther King Day, the West Hartford Public Schools, in partnership with Solomon Schechter Greater Hartford Day School co-sponsored the third annual community conversation. This year, an evening of storytelling served as a platform to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity within our community and promote an understanding of how our differences can add to the vibrancy of the human race. Reflection upon inspiring and thought-provoking shared narratives will continue to stimulate community conversations around inclusion, acceptance and social justice advocacy.

Town of West Hartford/WHPS [One Book, One Town](#)

One Book, One Town brings the community together by reading a common book which will stimulate conversations around its core themes. Beginning in 2015-2016, the Town of West Hartford, West Hartford Public Libraries, West Hartford Public Schools, the Noah Webster House, the West Hartford Human Rights Commission, Starwood Retail, and Barnes & Noble Booksellers Blue Back Square have joined forces to bring *One Book, One Town* to the West Hartford community.

District ESOL Outreach Coordinator

This fall the West Hartford Public Schools enhanced its services and supports for newly arrived immigrant children and families. With funds provided by the State Department of Education, two-part time outreach coordinators were hired. The primary work of the outreach coordinators is to ensure effective home-school communication, encourage active family engagement and support student success. Working with the ESOL Curriculum Specialist and the ESOL teachers, the outreach coordinators planned and hosted several family events this year. Two Welcome Nights for elementary school families were held in the fall. Over 70 families attended the programs. During the evening children and their family members were welcomed into the

school community, provided with vital information about the district, met key staff members and shared stories over a light pizza dinner. In January, an ice cream social for all ESOL families was held at Charter Oak International Academy. During this event, staff members provided information on the state assessment program and testing accommodations for English Language Learners.

Home-stay / Exchange Programs: The World Language Department offers several opportunities for students to participate in home-stay and student-exchange programs. These programs provide students with unique opportunities to immerse themselves in a new culture, practice their language skills in a genuine setting and create long-lasting relationships with host families.

During the Fall 2016-17 school year, West Hartford high school students hosted ten students from Rennes, France for a seven-day homestay visit.

This spring, 41 Chinese students will participate in a home stay visit in West Hartford. Conard and Hall High Schools will host a group of 24 students while Sedgwick Middle School will host 17 students. The visit is scheduled for February 4-7. The Chinese students will attend school with their host on Monday, February 6 and Tuesday, February 7.

The Intercambio exchange program offers students from West Hartford and Madrid a unique linguistic and cultural experience through a reciprocal homestay enriched by travel and academic activities during the summer recess. Participants become active learners who experience the dynamic global community from a new perspective.

School-Based Efforts: The West Hartford Public Schools encourages its schools and staff to offer unique school-based programs that align to the district's philosophy and serve the individual needs of their communities. These school based efforts include:

- Hall and Conard High Schools: Human Rights Day. For the past three years, both of West Hartford's high schools have held a day celebrating the struggle for human rights through history. On this day of celebration, high school students and staff offer workshops on a variety of compelling issues related to this topic.
- Charter Oak celebrates the United Nations International Day of Peace. The celebration includes Charter Oak student speakers, songs and poems, and a guest presenter-often a student from Conard's Human Rights class. As a community, we recite a Peace Pledge and the event culminates with the "planting" of student made Pinwheels for Peace around the grounds. This year we deepened our commitment to teaching and learning about peace with a fifth grade visit to the United Nations, funded by the Foundation for West Hartford Public Schools.
- Webster Hill Ambassador Program. Parent engagement is an essential element of our work to increase our cultural competence. The *Cultural Ambassador Project* at Webster Hill invites culturally and linguistically diverse parents to serve as guest readers in the classrooms of their children where they read bilingual literature to the entire class. Over twenty different readers in diverse languages have read to almost every classroom PreK - 5 in the past year.
- Wolcott Elementary School
 - ESOL Adventure Club was established with support from the Foundation for West Hartford Public Schools. The club offered students a thematic based experiential adventure program which included visits to the Faxon Branch Library, Westmoor Park and the Children's' Museum. Students catalogued their experiences and shared their learning with parents during the club's parent night.
 - Parent conferences were held at the Hillside Area Neighborhood Center (HANOC) in the fall. By holding conferences at this neighborhood location, Wolcott School promotes greater parent/school relations.

- Pre-School- Through a grant funded by the Foundation for WHPS, *Preschool Parent Storytellers Program* provides culturally and linguistically diverse families with access to children's books in their native languages. Twenty-five languages are represented. Staff and parents can acquire information on fostering bilingual language and literacy development at home.

Roszena Haskins, Kerry Jones, Anne McKernan, and Paul Vicinus will be available to answer questions.