



Youth Town Hall Meeting Notes - October 28, 2020

<p>Materials Link (referenced in Chat as well as during meeting discussion):</p>	<p>Information about code-switching: The Costs of Code-Switching</p> <p>UPCOMING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR NORWALK COMMUNITY MEMBERS -- Please feel free to register for the following racial equity workshops focused on Managing Unconscious Bias, BEDI: Belonging, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, and the Emotional Liberation & Self-Care of BIPOC at Norwalk ACTS Racial Equity Workshops.</p> <p>NATPSEquityWorkshops2020.pdf</p> <p>Proinspire, "Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture," 2019.</p> <p>AWAKE to WOKE to WORK:</p> <p>Quote by Carolyn Goodson, a descendant of a slave, in Edward Ball, Slaves in the Family</p>
<p>Panelists</p>	<p>Representing Brien McMahon, Global Studies at BMS, and Norwalk High</p>

Notes:

Defining the Lives of Students in Norwalk- Race and Equity in Schools facilitated by the Center for Youth Leadership, presented by Norwalk ACTS

Logistics and Norms

- Feel free to use the chat feature; any questions not answered online will be addressed offline.
- Technical disruptors on call will be rejected from ZOOM room.
- This is a safe space for students; please ask questions.
- For adults, listening as observers to the youth leading discussion.

Context for discussion

- Continued need to address fairness, bias, racial justice, policies affecting BIPOC students
- July- Christopher Columbus statue taken down.
- City of Norwalk launched Equity and Social Justice for All Commission.



- Protests due to the murders of George Floyd and Brianna Taylor nationwide as well as throughout Fairfield County.
- Stamford BOE race and equity statement (Summer 2020)
- Development of BMS Unity Committee
 - Review of curriculum and lesson plans.

Underrepresentation of BIPOC students in IB/AP classes

- You notice who's being placed in programs in schools (AP, IB classes); can trace back to elementary and middle school via 'Academically talented' (Now names 'Gifted and Talented'; division starts early.
- Getting into the program was dependent on teacher recommendation.
- Teachers treat you differently. ..My brother GT in 6th grade. Teachers had a change of how they talked to him; he saw the switch.
- Teachers...picked on me for more questions...were considered more of a favorite in it [because of being placed in AT].

How Does It Affect Students Academically/ Emotionally?

- When you separate children (gifted, not gifted), it sends a message that you shouldn't try because you're not in the program already; it affects young children's development.
- I was never in the program; teachers tried to put me in lower classes (based on being bilingual). My parents made sure I had a good reading level but continued to be put in remedial classes that weren't needed.

How translated into high school

- Teachers treat you a certain way based on your contributions Affects your self esteem confidence, choice of classes in high school. If you've had people tell you you're not capable, it's hard to have confidence in yourself.
- For BIPOC students, it sets expectations that are too high and damaging. I think that white students are allowed to be average a lot more in comparison to BIPOC. If we're not excelling exceptionally, it affects how we cope.
- You can really tell, (AP, honors), Ivy diploma programs are mostly white students who have had teachers and parents that they can get into this. BIPOC students don't get the same support from teachers as white students; more difficult.
- As a white student, I see disproportionality. [Being placed in higher classes] affects the egos of certain students and is a factor of who gets into AP classes in high school. Racism is already rooted systematically and that's problematic.
- They go to middle school and are considered above average; get stuck in the mentality



Are AT/AP teachers also POCs?

- Only 1 person who wasn't white (out of 10 teachers total)
- Most teachers- CGS (more diverse); teachers are all white. Most were white, a few black and brown. Doesn't help the minority students that are taught by white teachers, they can't see that they can be.
- It can be tough to have only one perspective on something.

How would you change minority students in AP classes?

- They should be more encouraging to have students try the classes. When you're in the classes, they're challenging your brain in a different way. It could be helpful for other students who didn't get into AT in earlier grades; could help them be better thinkers in life.
- A lot of teachers talking to POCs they should listen to what they want instead of deterring kids and saying things like, 'No, I don't think you can' and giving an explanation/ a reason why not.
- Starting early to freshmen and having conversations in class and how it would be great for them to join in junior year...they'll have something to look forward to, work harder. Not everyone will know where to go, those who know are white students have been told by their parents.
- Teachers should be able to recommend you; their job is to teach you and help you.
- Think it's an A (consistently) to move into an IB class; for French class (had a lot going on in my life at the time) and couldn't always make the grade. Had to override the recommendation by the teacher; I'm more than capable of [doing the work].
- Teacher recommendations are important, but students should have an opinion on where they place.

Student led based Equity Projects at BMS and Norwalk High

Acknowledgement: Thanks for teachers/ administrators who are working on issues that impact students' lives.

Norwalk High

In response to the world (murders of Floyd, Taylor; June 2020) wanted to make a change in my community and school. Reached out to friends. Developed the Conscious curriculum project to be a more accurate reframing of social justice issues and how they are taught in the classroom. '[I didn't realize until the summer] how much I didn't understand the prevalency of racism. It was like having a bubble popped'; It is the responsibility of schools [for us] to understand the world and teach about the civil rights movement to current issues, police brutality and schools.

Setbacks

- Was considered too radical by the Social Students Department Head; '[I think that POC were more important than the select view of students that have parents as cops.]'
- All teachers working on the project have been White; perception is skewed. The level they can relate to [the issues] is so much lower.



- Faced an issue with teachers on neutrality; what is the purpose of neutrality in relation to race? Don't believe it is a harmless act.

What you would have done differently

The way we have started the project- 4 students spending time with the Dept chair; would expand to allow for an expanded perspective. Could have been more productive to have more people involved; would have reached out to the entire department from the start.

Next Steps

Been meeting in the Dept meetings to hear what each teacher is doing. Specifically, started to develop a lesson plan on voting (importance of it, logistics). World History teachers are changing the curriculum to reflect racism throughout the world- ex. Apartheid to provide context for US History and Civics classes.

McMahon via McMahon Students Support Equity and Education.

Action Items:

- Dashboard on data, student rights
- Every academic review course offering and inclusive of BIPOC lived experience (quality health care, street art, works by BIPOC composers, meaning of monuments)
- Half of money used for school events should be spent at BIPOC businesses
- Development of Half year elective
- Development of Student Bill of Rights.
- Advocating for more BIPOC students in AP classes
- Work with administrators of BLM during state week of action
- Eliminate Mugshots in Police Press Releases
- Advocating for Juneteenth legal holiday.
- SEL classes used for racial equity- house, advisory. Most time spent on phones while teacher on computers. We can [better use time] to educate teachers, students. Would mean a lot to BIPOC kids that they're cared about. Teachers make excuses like, 'I don't know what to do during this time'.

Partner of Racial Justice Projects between high schools

- Learn about each other's groups; can work together especially with the social studies department with emphasis on materials.
- Make our social studies department to be inclusive.
- Use all the ideas to expand our project; exchange what has been collected.

Codeswitching

- Emotionally exhausting to hide who we are.
- When my mom was choosing my name, [she had to think of how others'] would be able to be identified as. She wanted to be able to be myself, not have others have assumptions about me.



- Parents did the same thing. If I become a parent, should I also give them a more common/neutral name so they can get better jobs? Depending on who I am talking to, tone goes higher. Tone gets different; change myself in order to fit in.

Codeswitching: How does it make you feel?

- Sad that it's a normal thing for us. Sad that we have to seem comfortable, we should be able to be ourselves. People shouldn't make assumptions of who they are.
- Sometimes it's a negative thing (whitewashing); trying to avoid the stereotypes from minority friends. Hard to know how you're supposed to act. It's harder to fit in and make friends when you have to decide how to act/ speak. Affects you in a negative way.
- Being in predominant white spaces- had to have proper grammar, so no slang, straightening hair to go to white events or be taken seriously. Pressure for students of color.
- Use Colonial name- chose specifically that no one could pronounce given name. Has a negative effect- ostracized from both cultures, [makes me feel] weird. Feel different from the rest of the bunch.
- At home, we speak proper English all the time. It's a standard my parents hold me to; have a large vocabulary. Asked by others 'Why do you speak so proper? You're the whitest person I know.' I've always spoken like this.
- Being ½ black, lacked community and representation. I didn't want to be Black. Straightened my hair; wanted a different name. Now I feel so different; it is a marker of my culture. These days I feel much more, can be, multitudinous. Accept that now; more about understanding my culture, more connected these days.

Open discussion as a BIPOC person in school

- Classroom; certain topics that are brought up are insensitive to BIPOC students. Example: Trump's policies of immigration (2016). Having questions like 'Do you these people deserve to be here?' by teachers. During history classes, a lot of students would bring up stereotypes (alcoholics, \$ from gov). Teachers don't take the opportunity to educate kids, correct the stereotype. Left 'just sitting in all that pain'.
- Work better on finding punishments that are equal . As a minority student, for some reason they get more of a punishment. Unfair for them. Time out of school shouldn't be ok; you should be teaching them. Not helpful.
- Experiences are pretty normal. Not noticing the little things anymore like snide comments from teachers.
- Feel like there shouldn't be an excuse for ignorance. Had a teacher who said that 'I don't' like being White' stereotype. Why would you say that to me based on stereotypes put on me as a POC?
- Deeply affected on how I accepted myself. Hated my hair, skin color. When I went to teachers, they brushed aside issues. How students interact with each other. More microaggressions (called



by another Black girl in my class), transcript swap with another BIPOC student. 'Education shapes students and we need to pay attention to how things go, how people develop.'

- Microaggressions- In the hallways if you're walking in school, mostly POC stopped in the hallway. Less likely to be stopped if White.
- Learned that it's important to stick up for your friends. 'You should feel a responsibility to stick up to your friends, try to help them the best you can to the best of your ability. Tell [people who are picking on them] that they're wrong. You can't keep watching it happen. Problematic that it's still happening and people don't change. Can't see why they're wrong, not making an effort to change.'
- 'A friend was called the n-word on her first day of high school. For her, she was super hurt, for me- it was sad what I said, [I said] just move on. It's an everyday thing at McMahon. It's very segregated. Friend groups and how people sit at lunch segregated.'
- On BLM- school was slow in response in letting the student body know this is a hard time and that they had their backs. Using the hard n-word, ignorant. We live this everyday; how do you know more than us?

Who do you go to?

- My family; a good group of friends. Don't think I could go to the teachers...

(Teacher underestimates me.)

- Can't go specifically to teachers; they can't understand the issues I'm going through. Go to families, friends.
- Hard to find to go to teachers. Norwalk High has a mental health person; not everyone knows of those resources. We rely on our friends and families.
- Even the POC % of teachers, administrators don't feel like they have my back as another POC. Some involve DCF, social workers which adds to the problem many face with parents who may not always be around and other family responsibilities. Sometimes we just want to talk. Don't complicate our lives even more.
- Good group of friends of varying races. Close knit bond, [allows me to] be emotional, beneficial. Grateful for it.

Come back for our November Youth Town Hall on ELL Students. Stay engaged and wear a mask.