

Newburyport Public Schools Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Cultural Competency Overview

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**Office of the Superintendent
Sean Gallagher, Superintendent of Schools**

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Introduction

The following document provides an overview of the ongoing work in the Newburyport Public Schools (NPS) around diversity, tolerance, equity, race, and cultural competence.

The mission of the Newburyport Public Schools, the port where tradition and innovation converge, is to ensure each student achieves intellectual and personal excellence and is equipped for life experiences through a system distinguished by students, staff, and community who:

- Practice kindness and perseverance
- Celebrate each unique individual
- Value creativity, experiential, and rigorous educational opportunities, scholarly pursuits, and life-long learning
- Provide nurturing environments for emotional, social, and physical growth
- Understand and embrace their role as global citizens

NPS believes that each person is worthy of respect and that a strong community celebrates individual uniqueness. Our work is based on the understanding that education is fundamental to an empowered, evolving society.

Creating a school culture that brings these beliefs to life means continuously addressing issues of bias, diversity, and equity at every level of the organization. Our work is focused on three main areas:

1. Educator Professional Development
 - Exploring our own biases
 - Understanding students' diverse experiences and identities
 - Supporting all students through effective choices in curriculum resources
 - Implementing instructional strategies to support diverse learners
2. School Culture Development
 - Designing developmentally appropriate and equity-focused practices for student intervention and discipline
 - Supporting intentional planning for school-wide celebration of diversity
3. Student Programming and Events
 - Creating opportunities for student voice
 - Developing peer leaders
 - Providing diverse club and out-of-school opportunities

All of these areas of focus are underscored by our responsibility to maintain a learning culture that keeps students safe, hears their voice, and gives them the tools to recognize and address intolerance and discrimination while solving conflicts in constructive and respectful ways.

Educator Professional Development

In our professional development work, we recognize that it is our responsibility to ensure curricula that are free from bias and to provide resources that allow each student to recognize themselves. Through workshops, courses, and in-service programming, we are asking educators to consider how their pedagogical style allows for equity, celebrates diversity, and encourages student voice.

In addition, staff professional development is designed to ensure that all staff are able to recognize when there are situations of intolerance, racism, sexism and hate happening in the district, and have the tools to intervene.

Since 2017, NPS has worked with Mr. Michael Eatman from Culture7 Consulting to provide professional development at all levels. With a focus on using a cultural competency framework to address diversity, inclusion and equity, our administrators work monthly in 1:1 sessions with Michael Eatman. In addition, Mr. Eatman works directly with our educators to provide workshops, support in problem-solving complex issues, and develop a deeper understanding of bias and equity in schools.

School Culture Development

Our District also works to develop school cultures that promote and model diversity. Through work at the district and building levels, we continuously assess our approaches to discipline and positive behavior intervention systems (PBIS). This focus on providing a safe school culture for all students ensures the district is always evaluating how our policies and procedures are affecting all children and families. We recognize that in a diverse school community, we will have many opportunities for growth, so structures to support conflict resolution and community-building are an integral part of our approach.

In addition, young peoples' voices need to be elevated so that educators can understand the experience of school from the perspective of our students. Each school has engaged in work intended to build lasting structures for elevating student voice.

Student Programming and Events

Students need opportunities to explore their own identity and engage in conversations with other students around issues of bias, stereotyping, and discrimination. Students benefit from a variety of programming that allows for large and small group settings and offers opportunities for young people to take leadership roles.

A Snapshot of Recent District Efforts

Below is an annotated list of some of our more recent initiatives.

Educator Professional Development

District Partnerships and Capacity Development

- The District has actively partnered with a wide variety of organizations, agencies, governmental units, and individuals to provide training and share experiences with staff and students. Over the last 18 months these include: Newburyport Youth Services, Newburyport Police Department, Newburyport Community Service, Our Neighbor's Table, Newburyport Human Rights Commission (HRC), the District Attorney's Office, the Office of the Attorney General, YWCA, Jeanne Geiger Center, Anti-Defamation League, DESE Safe and Supportive Schools initiative, Facing History and Ourselves, Teaching Tolerance, consultants Billie Donegan and Jeff Periotti, and author Nora Doole.
- Michael Eatman of Culture7 Consulting has provided multi-year professional development for the extended leadership team and all District staff around cultural competency, bias, and equity. All educators participated in a full-district professional development program in January 2021, as well as additional building-based workshops. Mr. Eatman continues to work extensively throughout the District.
- Since the fall of 2018, the District has worked with the nonprofit organization Essential Partners to develop educator skills in creating and facilitating constructive dialogue. Educators at all levels of the organization have participated in this work. In addition, the District has invested in two new teacher stipends for Dialogue Coaches.
- The District applied for and was awarded a 10-year Comprehensive School Health Services Grant (CSHS) in June 2019. One of the goals of the CSHS grant is to address discrimination, equity, and bias.

Curriculum and Instruction Development

- During the 2020-21 school year, educators at Newburyport High School (NHS) developed an Advisory unit to support a community read of the book *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson. As a part of the program, a member of the Equal Justice Initiative spoke with the NHS student-body and over 850 students and staff participated in dialogues. Dialogues were also run by NHS staff and students for the Newburyport community. School committee and city council members, parents, and over 80 educators from the Nock and Molin Schools participated.
- Between 2017-19, all Nock ELA and SS teachers (along with some art and music teachers) participated in workshops and curriculum consultation with *Facing History and*

Ourselves. The work focused on using “identity” to frame student’s experiences with history and to support teachers in using a range of resources and teaching strategies to ensure a diversity of voices were represented in the curricula. Social studies teachers at all three grade levels continued consultation with FHAO to write curricula and learn more deeply about the FHAO resources.

- Curriculum Resource development
 - Began reviewing text and resource selection policies to ensure they reflect the district commitment to diversity, equity and cultural competence.
 - The District has created a rubric for, and initiated Equity Walkthroughs of classes, to promote equity of opportunity.
 - Librarians at all levels are working to build resources that reflect cultural, learning style, and historical diversity.
 - A Nock Parent Advisory group began meeting in the 2020-21 school year. With support from Culture7 Consulting, this group of parents and educators began planning for three levels of work: rebuilding the Nock library collection, assessing the resources used by 6-8 ELA and SS courses, and evaluating the disciplinary codes. Three subgroups will meet throughout the 2021-22 school year.
- Courses
 - Newburyport High School designed a class called Perspectives in Leadership and Change. Working with the Department of Homeland Security, Edventure, and the McCain Institute, students identify a vulnerable demographic of peers prone to targeted violence (i.e. threats such as school shootings or terrorist activities) and create a systematic social media campaign to combat the potential violent threat.
 - NHS and Nock Middle School Advisory Programs: both the high school and middle school have worked over the past two years to add Advisory programs to their schedules. These programs allow dedicated time for staff to build strong personal connections with students, provide the space in the school day to build students’ sense of belonging and community, and offer opportunities for curricular programs (e.g. *Just Mercy* reading, Project Adventure programming)
 - Grade 7: Holocaust Unit.
 - All four 7th grade ELA and SS teachers have attended the *Facing History* “Holocaust and Human Behavior” workshop. Our anchor text, *I Promised I Would Tell*, is also a Facing History publication.
 - The units use specifically designed instructional strategies. Pulling from a variety of resources, the Holocaust unit is designed to allow students to

examine the history of the Holocaust and make connections to human behaviors.

- In alignment with the [Massachusetts Social Studies Framework](#), the 8th grade social studies year is based on students exploring their identity and understanding how identity affects citizenship and civic action. Many resources are used to explore voices in American history and support students in building a stronger understanding of the diversity of the American experience. The year culminates in a civic engagement project called *I am We*.
 - Civil Rights ELA and social studies units. These 8th grade units were also designed with support from *Facing History and Ourselves* and DESE workshops. Our ELA and SS staff attended multiple workshops exploring strategies for effectively teaching civil rights.
- The Molin School continues to use the [Second Step Curriculum](#), which addresses cultural diversity and bullying through lessons on empathy, impulse control, problem-solving, and anger management. These lessons are taught in every classroom at both grade levels.
- Wellness classes at the Nock and Molin Schools use a variety of units to address tolerance, understanding, and acceptance of differences.
- The Bresnahan continues to use the [Second Step Curriculum](#) to focus on building students' understanding of their own and other's identities.

Workshops

- Leadership Training by Jeff Periotti, DESE Director of Safe and Supportive Schools, was provided to all principals, senior leadership, counselors, and nurses to address gender identity, discrimination, and equity.
 - This training led to multiple workshops by DESE Safe and Supportive Staff at all four schools over the past 5 years.
 - The most recent LGBTQ+ training from this group was held during the 2019-2020 school year for all Bresnahan and Molin Staff and all Nock Instructional Assistants.
- The district leadership team participated in a variety of workshops and conferences to address equity in schools. Following this work, a series of district-wide discussions entitled *Racial Equity in our Schools* were led by District leaders. Workshop topics included equity and used the article 'Confronting Racism at an Early Age'.
- Educators from NHS and the Nock Middle School attended a 3-day workshop to become leaders in the ADL World of Difference program.

- In the fall of 2018, Nock staff completed professional development using *Speak up at School: How to Respond to Everyday Prejudice, Bias and Stereotypes. A Guide for Teachers*. Every staff member received a copy of this booklet published by Learning for Justice. The booklet served as the anchor text for a faculty meeting discussion.

School Culture Development

Community-based Programming

- To look broadly at issues of equity, the District began addressing food insecurity. This includes the creation of **Farmer's Markets** at Bresnahan Summer School and Open Houses. Equity issues were addressed by opening the market to the entire community. Our experience in doing this work not only forged bonds with people in our community who were experiencing food insecurity, it also created opportunities for greater community interaction and enabled us to move quickly to establish a food distribution program during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Our partnership with **Our Neighbor's Table** provides easier access to food throughout the entire year. We continue to work with Our Neighbor's Table to address food insecurity across the Newburyport community.
- A partnership with the **Home for Little Wanderers** allows students in grades 1-8 to have in-school access to therapeutic counseling. Providing easier access to counseling services allows NPS to support the growth and development of students outside of school.
- The Superintendent, along with building administrators, regularly attend **Newburyport's Human Rights Commission** meetings as school liaisons. The partnership with this community organization ensures strong and transparent communication about any incidents that may happen, provides support to the schools in addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusion outside of the school, and strengthens the community understanding of the work that needs to be done.
- The Superintendent is an active member of the **Newburyport Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee (DEI)**. This committee was established in the fall of 2020 with a goal of enhancing community-wide work around DEI.

School PBIS Programming

Bresnahan, Nock and Molin schools worked with the May Institute to develop Positive Behavior Intervention Systems. Educators evaluated current policies and procedures and developed new systems to support positive approaches to student behavior and proactive plans for creating an inclusive school culture.

- Molin staff have implemented a set of guidelines for their school, The Molin Way, which promotes the values of respect, responsibility, and kindness. These are taught through PBIS lessons and discussed consistently both in classroom meetings as well as assemblies.
- At the Bresnahan, we promote a PBIS motto of “Be Safe, Be Kind and Be Responsible”. This credo addresses expected behaviors of all students in various settings and between one another. These are taught at the beginning of the year and reinforced throughout the year in classrooms, at school assemblies, in small groups with our counselors and are embedded in our daily language.

Student Programming and Events

Student Voice

- As part of the equity work being done with staff and students at NHS, students recommended that NHS graduation gowns be changed to a unified color of gold sashes with burgundy gowns for all students.
- All 70+ Nock staff were released for one day to shadow a student. **Shadow Day** reflections were facilitated in small groups by teacher leaders. As a follow up, Nock staff shared the 2019-20 goal of enhancing opportunities to hear student voice and incorporate student feedback into curriculum and instruction. Teacher faculty meeting agendas continue to focus on opportunities to see school from a student perspective.
- **Essential Partners Dialogues:** Since 2019, NHS and Nock have worked with Essential Partners to promote constructive dialogue. Through this partnership, 15 teachers and 27 students at the high school were trained in the skill of facilitating constructive dialogue.
 - The primary goal is to generate a culture in grades 6-12 that allows dialogue around difficult and/or polarizing topics. Through constructive dialogue, all participants are heard, feel valued, and understand how the dialogue may lead to new methods, approaches, or policies.
 - NHS practiced their first dialogue in 2017 around redefining Valedictorian and Salutatorian now that high school no longer ranks students. This dialogue resulted in a policy change that was unanimously supported by the School Committee. In the end, dialogue allows for a safe place for differing ideas on a topic to be heard and understood.
 - NHS Essential Partners leaders supported the Nock in continuing dialogue among students and staff about the culture and curricula at the school. In the spring of 2019, all staff shadowed a student for a day. In the fall of 2019, EP leaders began meeting with Nock staff to design a dialogue that would continue the

conversations around student experiences in the school. In late winter of 2020, 60 students and over 70 staff participated in this student-facilitated dialogue.

- A proposal has been written to allow EP leaders to continue their work with NPS in the 2021-22 school year. A series of dialogues will be designed and facilitated with a focus on student-staff collaboration.

Clubs and Events

- Initiated a **Somalian Sister School Program** partnership with the NHS Social Studies Department and local resident Dave Fortier. While COVID-19 paused the momentum of the program, planning on a sister school partnership initiative for all schools in the next school year, students and staff are still maintaining on-line contact with their peers in Somalia.
- **World of Difference Institute ADL Newburyport High School**
 - During October of 2019, 33 Newburyport High School students participated in the World of Difference Institute Training. Trainers from the Anti Defamation League lead student and teacher participants through many discussions and activities designed to train students to become Peer Leaders. This was a comprehensive training in which students learned how to become positive peer leaders who promote a respectful, inclusive and equitable environment within our school and community.
 - Once the training was completed at NHS, Peer Leaders entered the classroom and conducted lessons with fellow students. They held discussions in smaller groups several times throughout the year. Some of their discussions and lessons included understanding the language of bias, learning how to recognize stereotypes, and building a positive school community. Although these peer leaders were not able to complete all of the lessons planned because of COVID-19, their work strengthened the school climate and made Newburyport High School as well as the Newburyport community, a more welcoming place for all.
 - Tom Abrams, Lindsay Neilson, Charlie Grossman and Principal Andy Wulf did a radio interview discussing our ADL work. Here is the link: <https://soundcloud.com/ncmhub/morning-show-on-wjop-with-mary-jacobsen-2020-01-31-nhs-adl-training-books-with-melinda-everett>
 - There have been periodic followup sessions and Google classwork for the ADL participants.
- **World of Difference Institute ADL Nock Middle School.** Similar to the NHS program, 30 student leaders participated in a 4-day workshop.

- At the Bresnahan, the PTO sponsored a **Cultural Enrichment** presentation by Norah Dooley, author of *Everyone Cooks Rice*. Her stories include stories from the neighbors and embrace the cultural diversity that is found within our communities and shows students how much they can learn from people in their own neighborhoods.
- **Nock Diversity Club** is a voluntary after school program where students in grades 6-8 meet bi-monthly to learn from each other and plan events for the school. In the past they have sponsored “Start with Hello Week”, Kindness Fairs, and “A Day of Silence”.
- **NHS Gay Straight Alliance** is a club for students in grades 9-12 that focuses on leadership development and activism that prioritizes building alliances, not only across sexual orientation and gender identity lines, but also across race, ethnicity, and class lines. In addition, resources and workshops are designed to facilitate coalition building.
- **NHS International Club** and the **International Cultural Club** are open to all students in grades 9-12. The International Club provides staff and students with opportunities to foster global awareness and understanding of other cultures, their backgrounds, traditions, food, and customs. The International Cultural Club’s mission is to provide students with opportunities to learn about the world beyond their community, and to learn how their community and they, themselves, are a part of that world.
- **Newburyport Antiracist Action** is a student-led group focused on providing antiracist education, resources, and dialogue to students of NHS and the community. By educating themselves and one another, while also engaging in direct action when needed, members work to create an actively antiracist, inclusive community in the high school, city, and beyond.
- **Girls Forward Gender Equality Club** aims to provide an open and safe environment for students of all genders to voice their thoughts and feelings about issues surrounding gender equality. The club focuses on holding meaningful and empowering discussions, fundraising, raising awareness at the local and global levels, and providing group members with an open forum to learn about how they may address gender inequality in everyday life and make a difference.

Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, our District mission is to ensure that all students have an opportunity to achieve intellectual and personal excellence. We will continue to invest in professional development to strengthen our approach to teaching and learning. In addition, we will invest in broadening our student programming so that all students feel a sense of belonging.

Finally, we look forward to on-going conversations with our whole community as we work together toward our shared goals.