

Summary from Input Received During Community Conversation about Racial Equity in Lawrence Public Schools January 30, 2017

The administration appreciates the large turnout for the Community Conversation. It is clear that Lawrence is a community that supports the success of all students. The Superintendent's Leadership Team has reviewed the approximately 70 pages of input received from participants' on individual index cards and table group posters. All of the input received is available on our district website.

This document summarizes participant input in order to:

- Identify key themes.
- Examine what the district has done/is currently working on in these areas.
- Discuss and obtain feedback on areas for improvement.

How is LPS doing to help students of color (your child) achieve to their full potential?
Responses fit generally into nine main themes. (Examples provided for each.)

Main Themes

1. Inequity for students/families; Lack of equal access/opportunity
2. Institutionalized racism, microaggressions, discrimination/harassment, white privilege evident/observed
3. Inconsistency school to school, classroom to classroom
4. Hiring concerns
5. Relationships with students/families
6. Communication concerns
7. Leadership/accountability; Adaptive vs. technical solutions
8. Safety concerns
9. We can do better.

Inequity for Students/Families, Lack of Equal Access/Opportunity

- Stereotypes, over-representation in special education, under-representation in gifted, advanced or enrichment for some racial groups, discipline disparities
- LPS is not doing enough because racial achievement disparities still exist and the experiences parents face differ depending on race.
- LPS is helping students of color with no obvious behavioral issues by identifying their strengths in school.
- Not enough opportunity for him to be challenged.
- Teachers are not equipped to create culturally responsive classrooms, where all students feel safe and can express their true selves
- No multi-disciplinary child-development approach. Instinct toward discipline.
- LPS is providing high quality teachers to my child. Providing some opportunities for growth in area of race. Overlooking some incidents that occur. Not considering other ethnic groups – Muslim, Jewish, etc.
- Drop-out rates for children of color are too high,
- Schools too segregated by race and economic class

- LPS needs to do more to help students of color feel important, learn in different ways, and make the most of their potential.
- My children are white...LPS is doing above average in helping my child achieve.
- Administration did not respond quickly and openly to teacher's racist comments.
- I am angry and frustrated about ways in which students of color/families of color and immigrant families are treated.
- Lack of effort and resources to have language accessibility for ELL families.
- Students of color are isolated.
- Unequal distribution of resources.

Institutionalized Racism, Microaggressions, Harassment, White Privilege

Evident/Observed

- LPS is too scared to name the problem and offer strategic initiatives. We need the district to say, black students need more resources than white students to be successful when white systematic oppressive policies are in place. Name it and stop covering to white privilege voices.
- The boundaries for the schools need to be more racially balanced.
- There have been experiences where he has been called names based on his race and it has interrupted his learning experience. His self-esteem has suffered.
- Achieve 100% buy-in from administration to educators on equity training.
- Accepted but expected to blend in.
- Our white students have not been impacted by their race in a negative way. They are learning from their teachers, peers and extra-curricular activities.
- What you look like impacts treatment: closer to white, easier experience.
- Microaggressions, systematic and internalized racism
- Expectations are made to athletic and intellectual abilities.
- Gets blamed for things even though he's following the rules. I teach him that he is expected to behave better than his white friends/students.
- Racist behavior was reported by a student and nothing was done about it.

Inconsistency School to School, Classroom to Classroom

- Schools are inconsistent. Some have strong leadership in self-examination, some don't.
- Students are not always heard/taken seriously when they have concerns about injustices they experience.
- Some teachers are very well informed and open. Other teachers are unaware and could care less.
- Some students of color held to high expectations.
- Better for high performing students than everyone else.
- LPS is doing a good job with helping students of color. Becoming more aware, growing. Hard to tell school by school.
- Why does LPS have some responsibility to cater to certain people and grant them special treatment? Everyone should receive equitable treatment based on their character not their race.
- Students are treated differently in schools (classrooms, hallways) due to race.
- Equity training is great idea, but it is not mandatory, therefore, not effective.

- Courageous Conversations (inconsistent application/use/accountability).
- The work has begun, but we acknowledge systemic racism occurs (data backs this up). However, there has been a lack of movement. The work is done by some and not accepted by others.
- Diversity is concentrated at certain sites – Hillcrest, LMCMS, LHS, to the benefit of those sites and the detriment of others.
- Failing because of inconsistency and lack of support (professional development, time commitment).

Hiring Concerns

- Have more employees/employers/teachers/staff who are racially diverse.
- Not seeing enough examples of people of color among staff, faculty and curriculum and community partners/leaders.
- The contributions of people of color should be touched on more.

Relationships with Students/Families

- Educating teachers on how to engage students.
- There needs to be more sensitivity among staff and modeling of appropriate interactions for students.
- Broader recognition that color/race matters and does impact a child's experience – addressed with thoughtfulness and grace.
- I am not being notified when my child is “slipping through the cracks”
- LPS has caring and dedicated staff to connect with children.
- LPS has provided opportunities for students to create great clubs like our Inter-Tribal Club. NASS is a great organization provided as well
- The individual school staff/teachers' interaction with students has been positive for those in our group. We recognize that if left to individual teachers, not all will have similar mindset.
- Students not feeling connected – part of the school.

Communication Concerns

- I honestly don't know how the school system is helping students of color. I think they have a person whose job it is to provide equity in the school system.
- Teachers and students are not comfortable discussing race, and this is slowing understanding and progress.
- Our children are having negative experiences because of a lack of opportunity to discuss race without being called racist.
- Room for improvement, such as more transparency (Schools should communicate about what they are doing.)
- Encouraging students to report problem behavior.

Leadership/Accountability and Adaptive vs. Technical Solutions

- Admitting where we are as a school district. The school district is working on it, but it's not the best yet. They can't just wait for complaints to arise, be proactive.
- Facing the challenge in an adaptive fashion versus a technical one

- LPS is using some programs like “Beyond Diversity” and in-school conversations for students about race to achieve their potential. But they need to take this much further, get all staff on board, and utilize all support groups within the school to help individuals holistically. There must also be a change in how behaviors are addressed-this should not be looking towards a punishment but rather why the behavior occurred. Principals must take responsibility for what is happening in their schools.
- LPS is having a discussion to talk about equity in our school system. These discussions do not happen across other KS districts.
- Building equity teams are addressing the needs of their building – teacher trainings around equity, student of color needs, engaging families in the discussion.
- Principals must take responsibility for what is happening their schools.
- AVID program helps students recognize their ability to have aspirations.
- Administrators at some buildings fail to acknowledge there is a problem and stop student mistreatment.
- I am disturbed about the teacher from South with racist comments who was allowed to resign rather than having anything put in record and be fired
- Failing grades are not addressed – just put through the system.
- There’s not enough connection between the district and the classroom

Safety Concerns

- We have a ways to go to create and maintain schools where all students feel safe and valued.
- Because I see daily students that are scared to go to school.
- To make a safe environment for all students.
- All 100% of students need to know they have a voice and feel safe to use it. Expect all staff to listen to and invite all voices to be heard and considered. Authentic safe spaces.

“We can do better!”

- I’m here because I feel like there has been too little understanding of the depth of racial inequity. Current political climate is scary at best. One observation could be that effort is being made, but progress is slow.
- A “one size fits all” strategy instead of realizing that we are all different.
- Be concerned and talk about the economic divide in Lawrence.
- Are teachers willing to step out of their comfort zone? Are parents willing to help their children to understand the problems that exist?
- Help me create a direction at school so all students have the same experience and achieve at highest levels.
- I want to see improvement and coordination of the board, students, and parents. Better understanding between ethnic groups.
- Academically more could be done to encourage students of color to explore more opportunities.
- Close the GAP! Disrupt. Not nearly enough. Not using our vast resources.

- I think that at my school our equity team attempts to listen to our students of color and their needs and thoughts. That being said, the recent data about students of color/gifted made me think we could be doing better.
- LPS system is not doing enough to hear those who report issues.
- LPS needs to improve in these areas: staff of color representation, curriculum represents people of color from a marginalized stance every time, equitable representation in special education, gifted, extra-curriculars, etc., accountability and transparency from district leaders, courses of rigor have diverse populations.
- That we need to be honest about how we are doing.

We also requested suggestions/feedback about ongoing district and school improvement planning and advisory processes.

- Training staff to see the problem, gain awareness and understanding of issues surrounding self, so they can self-identify how their own actions contribute to institutional racism in the schools and change those actions.
- Data driven instruction so we can keep track of students regardless of color.
- Role models for children of color. Mentors, guest speakers.
- Naming and identifying inequities. This is needed in the following places: curriculum diversity, academic achievement, grades, identifying different learning styles, providing interventions for failing kids at high school level, report from Lawrence Journal-World.
- Have programs that expose students to different cultures and backgrounds which will broaden how they see themselves and others.
- Empower parents by allowing them in the classroom.
- Looking at reflections of culture in materials and literature.
- We need more community conversations including parents, teacher and students
- Providing opportunities to improve (after-school mentoring, auxiliary services)
- Send parents survey by email and robo call to ask for suggestions.
- Providing clubs and organizations of color.
- Less top down. More bottom up.
- Use PASS (Partnerships for Academically Successful Students) to engage space and time for our community to work, play and learn together.
- Parents serve on functioning E-Teams
- Board should be representative of the full community racially
- Ensure that everyone is invited, welcomed and appreciated. This includes making sure families are invited in the language they speak, childcare is provided and transportation for families that need it.
- We want to see the district publicly acknowledge the issues of known inequity and work to tangibly address them at a professional level, rather than having “conversations.”
- To teach from a more global perspective

(All Community Conversation participant input may be found at www.usd497.org.)