



Equity Dispatch

Engaging Students as Leaders in Transformative Change Toward Equity

July 2015



IMPACT: Educate, Engage, Empower - for Equity

(Click words to navigate to sections)

"The most frequent cliché I hear regarding educational policy is, 'We're doing this for the good of the students.' We undoubtedly mean that, but the fact that students are not included in district-wide and school-wide decision making essentially excludes them from expressing what they perceive as 'for the good of the students.'"

~ Mark Phillips, 2015

Educate







Engaging students as leaders in transformative change towards equity has multiple benefits to school communities. Students have a vantage point unique from adults and can offer insight into some of the concerns that affect the educational experience for many students, including bullying, harassment, and peer conflicts (Partners Against Hate, 2008). Students who have opportunities to voice their opinions to adults and peers learn that their perspectives matter. Thus, encouraging students to become reflective social critics and skilled participants in social change (Banks, 1993) shift their role in the education process from "passive objects" to "active players" (Rudduck, 2007); and can affect school and community cultures in positive, measurable ways (Rudduck, 2007; Partners Against Hate, 2008).

Meet the Authors

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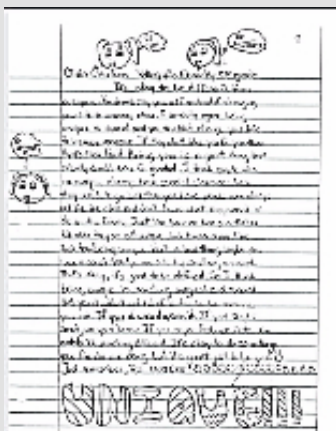
This month's theme centers on the opportunities school communities have in leveraging the assets, thought partnership, and leadership skills of their students. In this special edition, Northeastern Local School District (NELSD) in Springfield, OH is highlighted because of the district's efforts to include students as leaders in the district's Anti-Harassment-Intimidation-and Bullying (HIB) initiative. The district has engaged in a commitment to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students; and including students as leaders in this effort is one key strategy that the district is employing to great success.

Acknowledging the varied ways in which students can contribute to the cultural transformation the district is undertaking, district leaders planned multiple avenues for students to provide input into the solutions for proactively addressing harassment, intimidation, and bullying, and to assist in creating and sustaining a safe and inclusive school culture. We highlight three of those avenues in this edition of Equity Dispatch. The Educate section features one of the district award-winning essays by 5th grader, Olivia Garrison. The Engage section highlights the invaluable contributions students have made as collaborative members of the district's Climate Task Force, and during an annual Superintendent and student lunch meeting. As your school community continues to work toward engaging students as leaders in transformative change towards equity, the following content may be useful.

Be Unique

Olivia Garrison

Rolling Hills Elementary, 5th Grade



It's okay to be different from everyone. You should stay yourself instead of changing your life to impress others. I completely agree being unique is special and you shouldn't change your life to impress someone. If they don't like



Olivia Garrison is a fifth grade student at Rolling Hills Elementary School. A busy eleven year old, Olivia plays softball and basketball, participates in 4-H archery, and can be seen camping, and canoeing. She is active in her church and also enjoys reading, writing, and learning new things. Olivia has a younger sister, Amelia, who is nine.



As the Director of Pupil Personnel, Mr. Linson leads Northeastern Local School District's (NELSD) programs and student services including special education, pre-school, gifted, ESL, home instruction, and related services. His focus is to ensure all students meet or exceed district standards and that general education, special education and administrators take collective responsibility to support special education students to

you for you then that's their fault. Being you is a great thing that nobody should take for granted. I think people who are unique always have special plans on where they want to go, but then you have people who always act like the other and don't know what they want to do in the future. Just like how no two snowflakes look alike, they are all unique. And humans are like that, too. Being unique isn't a bad thing. Maybe you have secret talent, or want to try something unusual. That's okay. It's good to be different. So I think being unique is something magical and special that you shouldn't get rid of to try to be someone you're not. If you're a weirdo, own it. If you're super smart, use your brain. If you're super-fast, use it to win medals. Do something different. It's okay to do some things your friends are doing, but it's great just to be you! Just remember, BE UNIQUE!

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Engage



Northeastern Local School District School Climate Task Force

Northeastern Local School District (NELSD) has engaged in a commitment to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students. Specifically, the district is engaged in addressing harassment and bullying through NELSD's Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) Initiative. A critical component to that commitment is the [NELSD Climate Task Force](#) (Task Force), which advises the district on how to best foster a positive educational climate for all students free from bullying and harassment. The Task Force is comprised of district faculty, staff, community members, and students. The Task Force meets regularly to review school climate data and offer guidance to district leaders related to creating and sustaining a safe and

meet this objective. He also supports initiatives that foster effective parent/school collaboration toward the best interests of students.

In addition, Mr. Linson, is the district's lead on NELSD's Anti-Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) Initiative. In this role, he leads the HIB Task Force and Climate Committee, as well as serves as the district lead on intentional phasing in programming to support safe and inclusive practices.

Upcoming Events

Illinois

August 4, 2015
Assessment Review
Taskforce Meeting
Chicago, IL

Indiana

September 1, 2015
State School Bus Committee
Meeting
Indianapolis, IN

Ohio

October 30-31, 2015
Ohio TESOL Conference
Columbus, OH

Michigan

November 16 -17, 2015
Fall 2015 School
Improvement Conference
Lansing, MI

Minnesota

August 4 - 5, 2015

inclusive learning environment.

Mr. Steve Linson, Director of Pupil Personnel, described how the Task Force fits into the district's HIB initiative. The Task Force provides feedback to district administration and plays a central role in developing programming to promote a school climate in which all students are safe. Mr. Linson credits the student members of the Task Force for the district's progress and success thus far. According to the district's website, the Task Force has several charges. It raises awareness of students' and parents' concerns about harassment incidents, particularly in relation to the district's overall climate. It recommends strategies to prevent harassment and to improve the educational climate. Finally, the Task Force develops strategies to reach out to parents and families in order to build awareness around, address concerns related to, and gain feedback regarding the district's anti-harassment efforts.

Mr. Linson stressed the importance of an authentic, representational student presence on the Task Force. "In the past, we've never had a student presence," Mr. Linson explained. Describing the benefits of having students meaningfully involved in school climate change, he added "Students didn't just participate, they led. Having a wide range of students [reflecting the student body] meant they could identify and help plan events and activities best suited for different kinds of students."

In addition to the opportunities for student input stated above, the Superintendent and Director of Pupil Personnel also hosted a luncheon meeting with students. In this meeting, students were encouraged to speak sincerely about their experiences. Administrators relied on students to let them know if climate improvement efforts were reaching the broader student body.

When asked, Mr. Linson provides several recommendations on how to successfully involve students in a School Climate Task Force. He stressed the importance of actively recruiting a diverse group of students who will be engaged and who show initiative. A diverse group of students, he noted, should "look like the student body;" that is, it should be representative of students' race/ethnicity, gender, ability status, sexual orientation, etc. He also emphasized the need to work with students and let them lead. It is important that students know their contributions will make an impact.

The district's *Difference Day* is an example of how students made important contributions to the Task Force. *Difference Day* was an opportunity for NELSD students, faculty, staff and families to recognize and appreciate differences, unique talents, and strengths throughout the district. Mr.

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Leadership Conference

Minneapolis, MN

Wisconsin

August 17 -19, 2015

Wisconsin PBIS Network

Summer Leadership

Conference

Wisconsin Dells, WI

Linson noted that having a wide range of students who reflect the student body meant they could identify and help plan *Difference Day* events and activities best suited for different kinds of students. With student input, the Task Force planned an essay contest, a poster contest, brought in several community speakers to share stories of how their identities and school experiences were different than the norm, and even began to integrate *Difference Day* into a festival of student-created films.

With *Difference Day*, essay and poster contests, the annual Superintendent student luncheon meeting, and the School Climate Task Force, Northeastern Local School District has taken a positive step toward equitable treatment of students, toward creating a safe and inclusive learning environment, and toward intentionally engaging students as equity leaders in the change process.

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Empower



Something to Read!

Youth Empowerment and High School Gay-Straight Alliances

The students in [this article](#) have empowered themselves through research and education of issue surrounding sexual orientation. The students have used the knowledge obtained to educate and inform their peers about gay rights and the rights of others to assemble. The students featured empower themselves because of a personal connection to issues of gay rights which became the catalyst for the creation of a Gay-Straight Alliance in their high school.

Something to Watch!

The Student Voice Project at Springfield Public Schools



[This video](#) demonstrates the power of peer to peer learning in the area of equity and diversity. The students featured in this video recognized the need for improved relations among their peers and were proactive in organizing themselves and addressing issues of concern in their school such as bullying, racial and gender awareness, and sensitivity. The students featured are from diverse backgrounds and have varied interests. The students utilize

their interests and diversity to engage their peers and connect with them on a personal level.



Something to Use!

Creating Safe and Inclusive Schools: A Framework For Self-Assessment

This tool provides a framework for assessing the extent to which classroom and non-classroom spaces reflect a positive school climate. The safety and inclusion section assists in evaluation how well teachers recognize and utilize students' differences, and provide culturally responsive and culturally sustaining instruction. This tool also offers a socio-emotional safety and inclusion section in which the school and classroom cultures are examined to assess the extent to which students feel safe to express their personal identities and cultural practices without being afraid of being judged, punished or teased. This tool could be utilized to evaluate and improve the culture and climate of a school to create a more inclusive and equitable environment.

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References

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