

FCASD MAKES STRIDES ON DIVERSITY

Among one of the expectations for the Fox Chapel Area School District administrative team during the 2020-2021 school year was the creation and implementation of a number of diversity initiatives across the district's six school buildings.

At a special meeting in June 2020, the Fox Chapel Area School Board adopted a resolution, "Racism, Diversity, Equity, and the Educational Mission of the District," to bolster diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts districtwide.

Despite much focus commanded by the COVID-19 pandemic, the district's administrative team, faculty, staff, and students have worked collaboratively during the school year to meet many of the goals listed in the resolution.

Among the biggest accomplishments to date is the creation of a district-level Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee to focus on endeavors as a district and create both short- and long-term goals. This district-level Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee has overseen the development of building-level groups to support the mission of the districtwide committee and to focus on specific plans and initiatives in each of the school buildings.

"The committee was established to promote the essential value of diversity and the need for equity in the district, as well as to build a cohesive effort by engaging all building teams with the district goals," says Dr. Matthew Harris, executive director of secondary education and instruction, and leader of the districtwide committee.

According to Dr. Harris, the committee established a multiyear action plan that coordinates efforts in five main areas: professional development, curriculum and instruction, events, hiring practices, and diversity and equity assessments/audits.

During the 2020-2021 school year, the district's administrative team has conducted a number of professional development opportunities for staff on topics such as understanding terminology, personal reflection, and identification of key topics.

Another accomplishment during the school year has been the development of a new course for the high school, *Perspectives in History: African-Americans*, which will be piloted in the fall of 2021. The course is expected to appeal to students who wish to positively affect the climate in the school. The *Perspectives in History* course will examine the contributions of various ethnicities to the culture and history of the United States and the world and their impact on the political, economic, and social development of humanity.

"Students are so eager and excited to be change-makers," says Jessica Green, a Fox Chapel Area High School English teacher and sponsor of the school's recently established Fox Chapel Diversity Council. "Despite the challenges of COVID-19, students have worked diligently and tirelessly on a variety of anti-racism projects and concepts for the high school."

Members of the high school's Diversity Council are already looking to the future.



Fox Chapel Area High School Diversity Council founders, senior Melina Bradley (left) and junior Kaylee Uribe, examine books that promote inclusivity. The books were donated during a book drive sponsored by the Diversity Council and will be distributed to libraries and other organizations.

"Some future goals of the Diversity Council are to have more students of different socioeconomic statuses participate in events and activities," says junior Kaylee Uribe. "Additionally, we hope to have more guest speakers and activities in which community members can participate."

The districtwide committee plans to collaborate with local, regional, and national experts to support the district's short- and long-term initiatives. It also will undertake regular reviews of curricular materials at all levels. At the building level, elementary classes are conducting read-alouds featuring underrepresented populations and voices; schools organized theme weeks and Black History Month events; and students shared how they viewed diversity, equity, and inclusion in their schools.

According to Hartwood Elementary School Principal Dr. Rachel Fischbaugh, discussions and lessons on the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential to helping students learn and grow.

"They provide a focus on diversity, and, in essence, promote an understanding of our history as a country," Dr. Fischbaugh says. "Most importantly, these efforts allow us to model and shape critical thinking skills that are necessary for our students to be independent thinkers."

Dorseyville Middle School Principal Jonathan Nauhaus agrees, saying, "I think the efforts are important because they provide perspective to our students and staff, and require them to think about important and sensitive topics that they may not ordinarily navigate."

Despite the amount of work by the district's leaders during the school year, administrators recognize that their work is far from done.

"We all know there is much, much more to do to change practice, perception, and procedures related to diversity, equity, and inclusion," Dr. Harris says. "It will be an ongoing effort, as it should be."