
PROMOTING ANTI-RACISM AND RACIAL EQUITY IN FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Report At-A-Glance



This summary document of our full-length report is designed as a quick, at-a-glance guide that introduces our ten Actionable Changes, explains the reasoning behind each one, and lists our sub-recommendations within each Actionable Change. Additionally, our data collected from FPS former and current students and faculty and staff are highlighted throughout this document. For a more thorough investigation of our coalition's data, the extensive research used to justify our Actionable Changes, and/or additional sections like our definitions page, appendices, citations, etc., please see our report and supplemental documents page [here](#).

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Introduction

Fairfield Equity Coalition Background

The Fairfield Equity Coalition (FEC) is a youth-led organization taking local action to reimagine Fairfield's definition of what constitutes a comprehensive education. Our goal is to push for equitable policy and curriculum changes within Fairfield Public Schools (FPS) while raising awareness on injustices against marginalized populations within our community.

In June of 2020, current students and alumni of FPS joined together to form this coalition with the hopes of fighting for equity within FPS curriculum and the school system. At the height of our membership, FEC had over 80 general body members, each of whom contributing to one of our eleven committees: External Operations, Internal Operations, Publicity, Data, National and State Policy, Local Policy, Editorial, Civic Engagement, Countywide Collaboration, Longevity, and Recruitment. Our membership network is extensive, with members residing in states as far away as California and ranging in age from 15 to 27 years old. In the new year, we plan to grow in size and scope by inducting a new class of members that have sought admission since the summer. No matter our stage of life, we are united under the common goal of fostering equity both within FPS and in our community as a whole, starting with a focus on reducing racial inequity in education.

Our report describes ten Actionable Changes meticulously crafted and reinforced through intensive exploration of the leading academic research on racial equity and anti-racism in education. Making up the bulk of our report, these Actionable Changes are broad recommendations submitted to the Fairfield Board of Education for the explicit purpose of advancing anti-racism and racial equity in all facets of Fairfield's public education system. Each Actionable Change is its own section of this report, beginning with the direct perspectives of FPS students, faculty, and staff compiled through our own survey work, followed by the relevant research that supports the adoption of the Actionable Change. Finally, each section will include specific sub-recommendations that offer tangible actions to achieve the larger goal of the Actionable Change. Actionable Change No. 10 is unique from the first nine in that it provides logistical guidance - like funding mechanisms, suggested implementation timelines, and accountability measures - so the preceding Actionable Changes can be put into practice.

A Note on Intersectionality

When we speak of the ways in which structures of power shape the experiences of those within our community, rarely is it in reference to a single element of one's identity. Studying these interactions in a vacuum not only over-simplifies the lived experiences of traditionally marginalized groups, it also stratifies the conversation in such a way where we are unable to fully realize our own shared humanity. This practice of seeing, understanding, and coming to value the entirety of another human being is the single-most-important prerequisite for cultivating a more just and equitable society. Therefore, while this report addresses the equity gap in FPS specifically through the lens of race, the broader efforts towards equity encompass many more intersectional identities and factors. If we wish to create a truly sustainable and inclusive change within the FPS system, we must examine how class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, and other factors influence how students see themselves in relation to established systems and institutions.

Though we plan to address these additional factors in future reports and conversations, we urge FPS to consider including other marginalized groups in the structural changes we are proposing in this report. For example, LGBTQIA+ inclusivity can be furthered through the application of this report's recommendations for hiring practices, required literature, curriculum, et cetera.

FEC Survey Data

The data collected by FEC for use in this report stem from three of out four anonymous surveys administered over the course of 2020 to both FPS teachers and staff and current and former students, respectively. Each survey asked respondents a range of questions that, broadly speaking, can be categorized into two groups: questions about the ways in which race is taught in the classroom and questions about how incidents of racism are rectified in FPS. These surveys were intended to measure the FPS community's perspective on race as the anti-racism movement gained traction.

The data collected by FEC reveal a strong desire from FPS faculty, staff, students, and alumni to improve anti-racist teaching and racial equity within the district. Both students and staff shared disturbing stories of racist remarks directed at themselves or a peer. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of respondents in all three surveys wished for curricula across subjects to include racially diverse perspectives and more complete and accurate teachings on the subject of race, from institutional racism to racial identity. Taking the macro view, most of the respondents expressed a desire to see the education, treatment, and understanding of race improved within the district in the spirit of becoming more anti-racist. Importantly, the results from our surveys were foundational to this report; the Actionable Changes below came from these community perspectives and are reaffirmed with subsequent FEC data disbursed throughout this report.

ACTIONABLE CHANGE NO. 1

Ensure curricula for all grade levels prioritizes cultural and racial diversity by amplifying representative perspectives and experiences of historically marginalized groups.

In order to move away from pedagogies and curricula that are more narrow in perspective, FEC is calling for the decolonization of curricula. Though not necessarily with any conscious or malicious intention from faculty and administrators, for generations, the history taught and the research advanced in schools has reflected not only an Orientalist perspective originating from colonial powers, but one that has incorrectly captured the experiences of Black, Latinx, Asian and Indigineous peoples. This process of decolonization requires that schools alter not only which stories are being taught, but by whom. Thus, FEC calls on FPS to not only incorporate but prioritize the stories of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), as told from representative authors, in an attempt to expand the educational context for students and cultivate cultural knowledge.

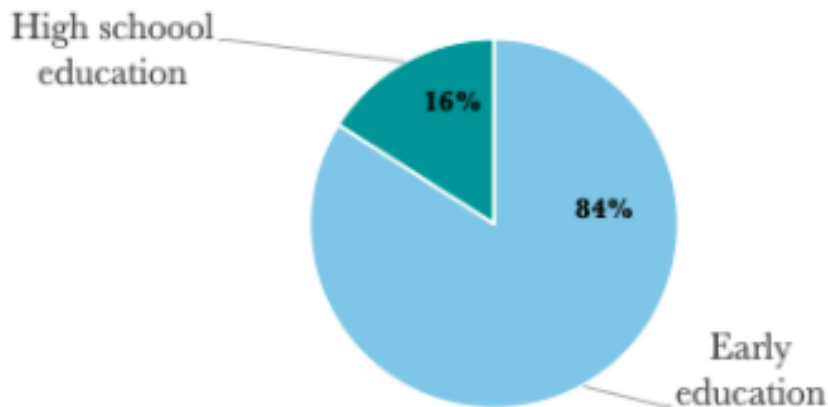
“I feel like these topics should be taught at an earlier age. I think starting as early as elementary school and 6th grade is important. I only remember learning about social justice themes in high school.” - Class of 2014 on the subjects taught during their time in FPS that felt inadequately or incorrectly covered, especially in regards to themes concerning racial equality, or marginalized groups.

“I feel that history classes covered racial inequality as if it was a thing of the past. For example, we learned that slavery and the civil rights movement happened, but I don’t remember discussing the current ongoing racial inequalities in America.” - Class of 2014

“I First think we all need to understand anti-Blackness. What does it mean? How does it impact students? How has our history been written through a white lens that completely removes black perspective and ugly policies and practices towards black Americans? I want to see a more honest approach to the history we teach students. I want to see us actively acknowledge the contributions of diverse scientists, engineers, and policy makers. I do not know what curriculum looks like in the middle and high school but there are probably changes that could be made.” - Elementary School teacher on what they want to see changed within the FPS curriculum, specifically regarding anti-racism and anti-Blackness.

“Training is not the issue. Time within the curriculum is. Although one can fit material outside the core curriculum in with cleverness and effort, it is hard as the current curriculum does not even fit well in a year. The forces on our curriculum err so far on the side of requiring as much as possible in a year that teachers are forced to take a poor, expedient approach to just getting the required material across let alone having time to enhance the curriculum.” - High School teacher.

When should FPS introduce anti-racism teachings?



84% of respondents to our first student survey felt anti-racism teachings should be incorporated into early FPS education, aligning with the consensus in academia that these concepts are most effective when incorporated into the education of young children.

Ultimately, FEC calls for a collaborative reimagining of the district's curriculum to ensure that FPS prioritizes cultural and racial diversity across all disciplines and grade levels. This is not to suggest that the present curricula is of no value; there are many elements of the FPS curricula that offer students quality material. Nevertheless, curricula must be reimagined to incorporate anti-racism into its lessons, both in terms of the official curricular documents in the long term, and to decisions made by teachers in the short term. We want to re-emphasize our appreciation for the difficult process of curriculum development, and the many teachers and staff who are already working diligently to incorporate anti-racism principles into their instruction. We hope this section will help advance the ongoing process of curriculum reform through the lens of anti-racism and decolonization.

Summary of Recommendations:

Social Studies

- *Create conversations around fairness and the racism experienced by BIPOC people.*
- *Alter curriculum to explicitly teach about racism, anti-racism, and marginalized peoples' histories, from their perspectives.*
- *Change curriculum to correct false narratives and add new electives*

English

- *Include books which talk about racial identity and racial prejudice.*
- *Alter curriculum to explicitly include and amplify diverse authors.*

STEM

- *Alter curriculum to explicitly acknowledge the contributions of BIPOC scientists to content taught in STEM classes*
- *Highlight teachers' identities.*
- *Tailor class structure to student demographics and needs.*
- *Rephrase and restructure opportunities for students to ask questions.*
- *Include identity affirming activities in class. Include conversations about racial injustice in STEM across the relevant subject areas.*

Music and Art

- *Music: Diversify composers and genres studied and performed.*
- *Art: Move towards culturally responsive art education.*

World Language

- *Further incorporate social justice issues into world language courses.*

Health

- *Expand health education to include the social determinants of health (SDoH).*

ACTIONABLE CHANGE NO. 2

Implement mandatory anti-racism, implicit bias, and restorative justice training led by independent professionals for all faculty and staff on a frequent and ongoing basis.

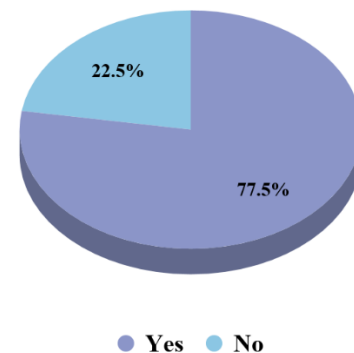
"Yes, inequitable treatment to students of color by teachers and administration" - Class of 2016 on their personal or witnesses experience of racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher or administrator at FPS.

"Yes the latin teacher at FLHS said the N word in my class and thought it was okay" - on their personal or witnesses experience of racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher or administrator at FPS.

"The change needs to start with the adults reflecting and acknowledging their own biases First." - Elementary School teacher on what they want to see changed within the FPS curriculum, specifically regarding anti-racism and anti-Blackness.

"Trainings that explore systematic racism, particularly bias and how racism affects students and staff within a school building and across a district. I think many people are blind to the impact and reality of systematic racism but would be open to learning and exploring." - Elementary school teacher.

Did you ever witness racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher, peer or administrator at FPS?



The overwhelming majority of respondents (77%) to our first student survey said they witnessed racial insensitivity or discrimination from a teacher, peer, or administrator at FPS, suggesting the need for extensive training for faculty and students in anti-racism, implicit bias, and the other trainings outlined in this section.

The prevailing consensus, supported by our teacher survey and various anti-racism studies, is that a lack of education on race for teachers contributes to both the marginalization of BIPOC students and the discrimination of BIPOC teachers. Pirette Mckamey, former Principal of Mission High School in San Francisco and an anti-racism educator, argues the difference between a teacher trained in anti-racism practices and one who is not can mean the difference between an A and a C grade for a Black student (Mckamey, 2020).

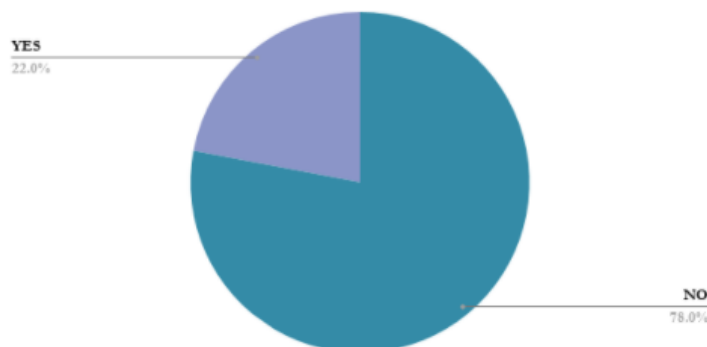
Research also indicates that teachers who are not educated on racial issues are often insensitive to both their students and BIPOC coworkers, which can quickly sour a professional environment and create a hostile workspace (Coleman and Stevenson, 2014). In a district like Fairfield, where BIPOC staff members makeup only 3.03% of the district, these issues are often exacerbated (CSDE, 2019). As such, regular anti-racism, implicit bias, and restorative justice training must be implemented and made mandatory for FPS faculty and staff.



Not only students experience racial harassment or discrimination at FPS; 64% of respondents to our teacher and staff survey also responded to the above question in the affirmative.

The ability to have productive discussions and think critically about racism in our society is an essential skill for administrators and educators alike that must be developed in concert with curriculum content. As FPS shifts towards a more culturally-competent, narratively-inclusive form of education, it is imperative that faculty are equipped with the intellectual and pedagogical frameworks to confront personal biases and challenge bigotry. FEC strongly believes FPS must develop a comprehensive enrichment program that aids staff members in developing anti-racist, socially aware mentalities to make quick, effective, and restorative choices when dealing with racially-complex situations.

Do you feel that the mandatory trainings you receive enable you to implement anti-racist teachings in the classroom?



With 78% of respondents to our teacher and staff survey suggesting they are ill-equipped to incorporate anti-racism into their role at FPS, there is ample need for these trainings to be developed and incorporated into regular professional development.

First, we strongly recommend the implementation of mandatory culturally-competent pedagogy training across all disciplines, which will introduce staff to novel educational methodologies that reimagine how to have difficult conversations respectfully and constructively. Second, we propose across the board implicit bias training, which helps teachers recognize the underlying stereotypes and assumptions that shape their perspectives. Third, we urge that restorative justice training be put into practice, which prioritizes understanding, empathy, and accountability over traditional punishment. Finally, we advocate for de-escalation training, which will keep intense situations involving educators and students from mushrooming out of control. It is our sincere hope that these trainings, one crucial step among many, will guide the educational future of the FPS, so that difficult conversations and incidents involving race reach better outcomes.

Summary of Recommendations:

- *Require culturally competent pedagogy training.*
- *Improve implicit bias training.*
- *Implement restorative justice training.*
- *Implement de-escalation training.*

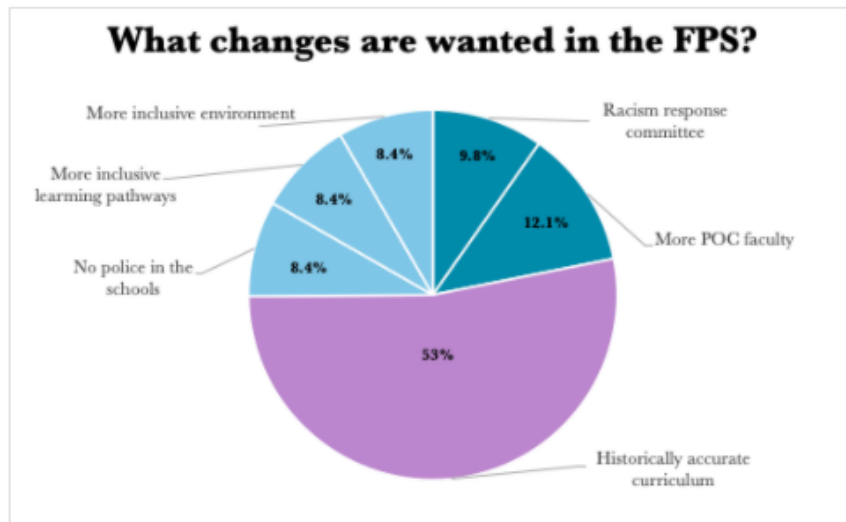
ACTIONABLE CHANGE NO. 3

Implement mandatory presentations, courses, and training across all grade levels where students will learn about the social construction of racial and cultural identity and its influence on themselves and others.

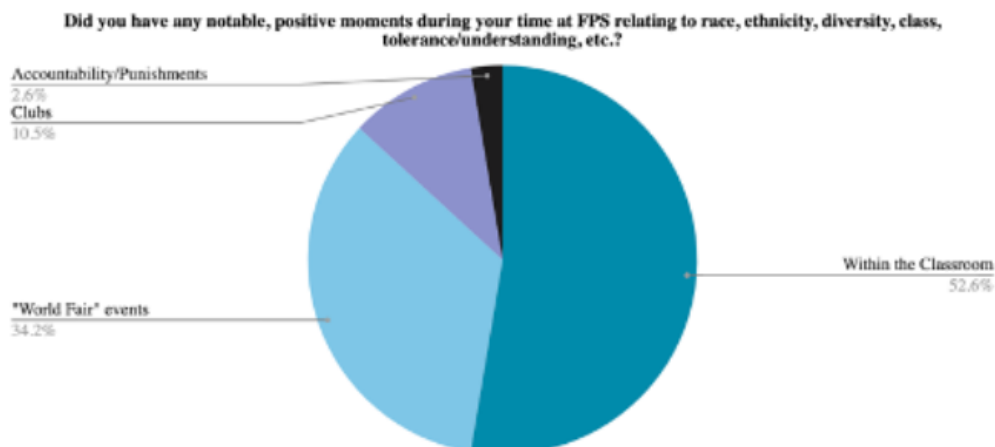
“Speakers are so amazing for people to hear stories. a cultural day where we go around and hear a little bit about different cultures a over the world is a great way for representation and exposure to different cultures (show that they are “weird” but beautiful because they are different)” - Class of 2023

“I think having more speakers that are BIPOC will greatly impact students' experiences. Since I had no teachers of color, I would have loved to listen to speakers that were BIPOC. I think students learn a lot from people's first hand experiences.” - Class of 2014

Education is a powerful tool that can be used to combat racist beliefs and promote allyship. In order to harness the power of education, it is important that students gain the knowledge and resources necessary to address our country's history of marginalization and oppression and its impact on the social structures of today. We call upon FPS to make a firm commitment to developing anti-racist educational programs that are supplemental to decolonized curricula. It is not enough to celebrate diversity and multiculturalism in our schools; FPS must implement mandatory presentations and activities in the form of readings, screenings, assemblies, and field trips which serve to supplement anti-racist curricula. Doing so will educate students on their own biases, create a welcoming environment for students of all races and ethnicities, strengthen the school community as a whole, and help prepare FPS students for success in an increasingly global society.



Some of the desires of respondents expressed in this graphic can be actualized through presentations, field trips, and other measures outlined in this section that extend beyond specific curriculum reform. This is especially evident in the desires of a more inclusive environment and learning pathways, which can be achieved through mandatory presentations, courses, and training on racial and cultural identity.



Of the respondents who experienced positive moments related to diversity and/or tolerance at FPS, the majority (52.6%) experienced them within the classroom setting. Another common response conveying these positive moments was the "World Fair events" hosted by respondents' individual schools. This type of event, like the other measures outlined in this section, should be considered as potential opportunities to expand anti-racism education outside of the FPS curriculum itself.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Utilize books on race and diversity as supplements to specific curricula or as schoolwide readings.*
- Regularly schedule presentations, assemblies, and events for students regarding race.*
- Offer a wider range of diversity-oriented electives.*
- Incorporate race/diversity-focused field trips into the curriculum.*

ACTIONABLE CHANGE NO. 4

Recruit, hire, and retain racially diverse, culturally competent school faculty and staff.

Research strongly suggests that working and studying in predominantly White settings, similar to the demographic makeup of FPS, can harm both White students and BIPOC students by stifling rather than facilitating and expanding academic and personal growth (Anderson, 2015). Students of all races perform better when placed with BIPOC teachers. White students respect and appreciate non-White leaders, and BIPOC students see themselves represented in their education, helping them respect and appreciate themselves and their potential (Anderson, 2015). The lack of diversity amongst educators in the FPS is profoundly troubling. It exposes a preference for White faculty, a preference that inhibits learning outcomes and cultural competency. In the past few years, there have been increased efforts by the BOE to hire educators from presently underrepresented backgrounds, but these efforts have yet to make any considerable shift in the grossly disproportionate demographics of FPS today. If FPS is to become an equitable, equal, anti-racist district, it is an absolute precondition that present hiring policies must dismantled and reestablished. FPS must move beyond abstract goals and dreams, and create an explicit plan to recruit, hire and retain racially diverse, culturally competent school faculty and staff.

“There is absolutely no diversity in staff. In my time at FPS, I never had a teacher who was not White, and I didn't realize the impact that had until I moved and attended a school where there was diversity in staff. I was so excited to see someone who had the same background as me, and I remember thinking, “This is the first time I've had a teacher who is like me and who can relate to me.”. Even just seeing their name on my schedule was huge - the first time I had seen a name that wasn't European, but rather similar to my own.” - Class of 2021

“Terrible. This year most of my teachers are at least White passing (i shouldnt [sic] assume) and i don't think i've ever had a black, asian, middle eastern, teacher. it's especially important to see diversity at a young age because that's when kids are taught. and representing matters.” - Class of 2023

“Better hiring/recruiting of bipoc teachers, listening to the bipoc community to their lived experience and believe them and make required changes for a more equitable education” - Sixth-Eighth Grade teacher on what they want to see changed within the FPS curriculum, specifically regarding anti-racism and anti-Blackness.

“Trainings that explore systematic racism, particularly bias and how racism affects students and staff within a school building and across a district. I think many people are blind to the impact and reality of systematic racism but would be open to learning and exploring.” - Elementary school teacher.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Create and use a set of explicit interview questions geared towards hiring culturally competent staff.
- Create a guide to recruit more diverse staff in accordance with state law SB 1022.
- Add culturally competent pedagogy and/or racial equity in education certification/training as a preference in hiring.
- Recruit BIPOC educators from other institutions.
- Recruit BIPOC educators from our own schools.
- Lessen focus on experience minimums, and increase focus on performance based tasks when evaluating applicants.
- Expand upon the TEAM program to include Black ERGs and EAPs.
- Expand upon the teacher mortgage assistance program by supporting affordable housing.

ACTIONABLE CHANGE NO. 5

Redesign the pathways to success to meet the needs of all students and ensure that race, socioeconomic status, etc. will not predict any student's educational outcome.

"Didn't personally experience, but witnessed that my friend (a POC) felt stigmatized because of her race and felt like it was impossible to "improve" because the cards were already stacked against her." - on noticing or personal experience with racial discrimination in FPS' tracking methods and/or gifted programs.

"I think the texting that they do to place student son[sic] the gifted track is inherently biased. In elementary school, when testing begins, a major factor of a student's "intelligence" aka ability to score well, is their home life.. which varies, obviously, but in Fairfield I feel like the school's assumption is that everyone has a safe home with at least one parent available after school for hww help etc." - Class of 2016 on the racial or cultural bias in the non-gifted tracks.

"Our Math program is increasingly under pressure to allow parent selection in asking for the advance track for their children which is creating a clear racial divide in our programing [sic] at TMS for multiple reasons. We need to get rid of Math tracking at the Middle School level so we can employ the use of cooperative instruction and other equity teaching strategies which would benefit every child of every level of mathematics across the district." - Seventh Grade teacher

"we need to ask questions about representation in such programs and then dissect why/how we measure who is eligible. What are the racial demographics of these classes? How do we measure "gifted" "talented" "advanced?" What opportunities do kids have to show their unique intelligences? This is also so deeply connected to SPED. What opportunities are we creating for kids to understand themselves as learners and make choices about their learning? Who has historically had access to these classes and why?" - Third and Fourth Grade teacher

The ways in which student success and ability are measured must be reimaged so children of all identities and backgrounds have the opportunity to succeed. The subjective nature of student tracking means that implicit bias often influences student results and can marginalize BIPOC students and those of lower income backgrounds from higher level courses, including FPS Advanced Placement courses. Placement in a lower level course can weaken student self-esteem. Instead of segregating elementary school gifted students from the rest of the student body, we call for restructuring all elementary coursework to include the gifted program's benefits and provisions. We call for a growth mindset to be promoted in all students and to provide open enrollment options in all high school subjects, so that race and socio-economic status do not function as formal or informal barriers to higher level courses. In addition to reimagining expectations of success, FEC calls for alternative ways to measure student progress, including narrative grading, non-weighted GPA, and a de-emphasis of standardized testing, to engage students in their own learning processes. Cultivating student agency will empower students with self-advocacy and the mindset to succeed in both FPS classes and future endeavors.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Reimagine student preparedness and expectations of success.
 - Develop the growth mindset in all students.
 - Incorporate the benefits and structuring of gifted and talented programming into all elementary school classes.
 - Remove math tracking from 5th to 8th grade.
 - Create open enrollment in all high school subjects.

- Change the ways in which student progress is measured.
 - Remove weighted GPA.
 - Require narrative evaluations of student progress with each report card.
 - De-emphasize the importance of standardized testing.
 - Cultivate student agency

ACTIONABLE CHANGE NO. 6

Reimagine discipline systems by shifting toward restorative practices and invest in resources that will support and empower all students.

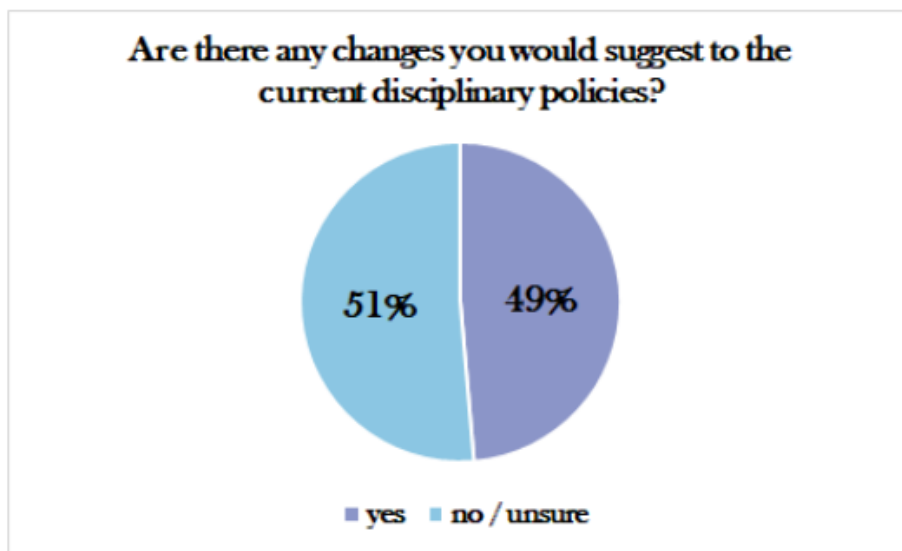
“Black students facing more detentions. Instead of educators trying to understand or give black students the benefit of the doubt, educators more quickly choose to punish.” - Class of 2009 on their personal or witnessed experience with racial discrimination in regards to how the discipline systems are used within FPS.

“In middle school and [sic] White girl verbally and physically assaulted a black girl and the black girl fought back. The black girl was suspended for multiple days and the White girl had no disciplinary action taken on her. The White girl skipped school for a few days out of embarrassment while the black girl wasn't allowed to be in school for a few days due to the fight.” - Class of 2016 on their personal or witnessed experience with racial discrimination in regards to how the discipline systems are used within FPS.

“I do not believe that suspensions and expulsions are effective forms of discipline. I think it only reinforces a negative self-narrative and does not address the root of the issues that let the students there. Evidence-based practices that have been show to help with school behavior should be the basis of disciplinary policies.” - Third-Fifth Grade teacher on the effects of the current disciplinary policies on students.

“Punitive disciplinary policies have an adverse effect on minority students. There are too many assumptions made at the beginning of the behaviors. Students of color are disciplined in higher numbers than their white majority counterparts. Some of this due to that the white students are given the benefit of the doubt more often, even though they are engaging in the same behaviors. They are given more “warnings” prior to the disciplinary action. The policy has to implemented the same across the board for all, otherwise it doesn't work. Also ISS, OSS, expulsion do nothing to fix the problem behaviors.” - Ninth-Twelfth Grade teacher On the effects of the current disciplinary policies on the students.

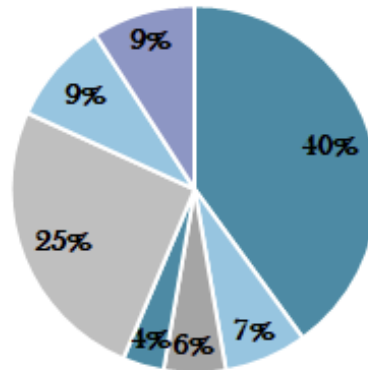
FPS must remedy the practices that lead to disproportionate discipline of BIPOC students and invest in practices that will foster a positive climate for all students. As such, FEC calls for FPS to move away from exclusionary discipline practices -- defined as any type of punishment in which the offender is removed from his or her typical academic setting. This punishment most commonly ends in suspensions and expulsions, which implicitly informs the student that they do not belong while failing to reduce the likelihood of future misbehavior. The goal is to replace these programs with restorative justice measures, defined as a holistic approach to discipline that relies on bringing all parties impacted by an issue or behavior together to repair harm, reduce risk, and build community.



A majority of respondents (51%) to our teacher and staff survey thought current disciplinary practices should be amended.

This shift towards restorative justice will require the eventual hiring of a restorative justice coordinator to begin implementing proactive, community-strengthening approaches to justice such as meditation circles and victim-offender conversations. We also recommend embedding social-emotional learning within our schools, a multi-disciplinary process that centers the psychological components of academics. Through SEL, children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, learn how to feel and show empathy for others, and establish and maintain positive relationships. We also call for FPS to invest in affinity-based counseling for students, wherein students and counselors share a common background or identity. Both restorative justice practices and affinity-based counseling will help students to productively cope with their emotions.

Are there any changes you would suggest to the current disciplinary policies?



■ restorative ■ stricter ■ training ■ bias ■ consistency ■ parents ■ other
more information on responses in caption

The above graphic depicts the desired changes to disciplinary policies expressed by the respondents to our teacher and staff survey. **Restorative:** Teachers recommended the implementation of restorative justice practices with respect to disciplinary policies. **Stricter:** Teachers recommended stricter disciplinary policies. **Training:** Teachers requested more training on how to enact disciplinary policies. **Bias:** Teachers noted the need to ensure that bias does not play a role in how discipline is given. **Consistency:** Teachers noted the need to ensure consistency in how discipline is given across grade levels, subjects, staff vs. teachers, etc. **Parents:** Teachers noted the need to either make some parents more involved in the process, or the need to resist parent pressure with respect to how discipline is given. **Other:** Reason(s) other than those listed here.

Summary of Recommendations:

- *Integrate restorative justice at the classroom, school, and community level.*
- *Get counsel from professional speakers and initiative guides.*
- *Incorporate restorative justice into the District Improvement Plan.*
- *Hire more BIPOC counselors and create racial caucus safe spaces.*
- *Conduct audits of our existing mental health and counseling programs.*
- *Train staff in Social and Emotional Learning.*
- *Acknowledge and work around racial and socio-economic barriers to equity in SEL implementation.*
- *Educate staff on racial and cultural impact on students' social-emotional health and learning style.*

ACTIONABLE CHANGE NO. 7

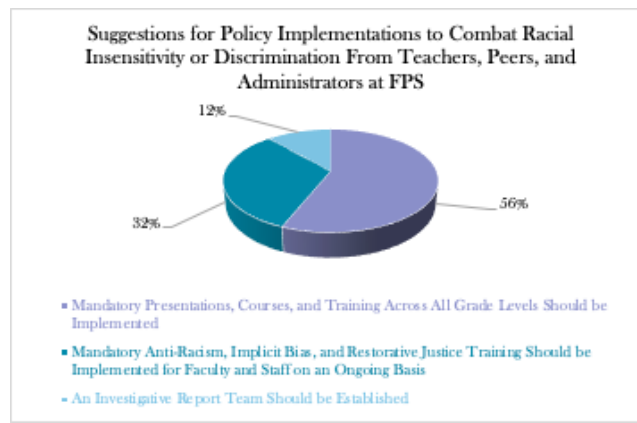
Create an explicit, district-wide anti-racism policy and establish a community-based restorative justice committee to prevent and repair harm in cases of discrimination and harassment in FPS.

“I haven't had an encounter with blatant racism, but my brother has as a student of FPS so I will share his experience (I have his permission). My siblings and I are biracial; We have a White mother and a South Asian, Muslim father. My brother has encountered racist verbal remarks from peers calling him a "terrorist", which I would imagine is not an uncommon occurrence for many other South Asian Americans in FPS. My brother's peers would say these things to him jokingly and my brother would laugh it off. My mom and I did not discover that this was going on until we saw his yearbook, which to our horror, was not signed with the usual "HAGS", but rather sickening racist remarks. Things like "ur a terrorist but we still love you" and "I hope you don't blow up the school"(we have photos, if you'd like them). My brother never said a word or reported it to anyone because he said that they were "jokes", and I suppose that he probably took them in stride because they were par for the course at that point. The most striking part of this for me was that children as young as 12 understood power structures and their place and privilege within them. White children had the bravery to write these derogatory statements because they knew their punishment, if any, would probably just be a slap on the wrist. At the end of the day, their Whiteness was a "get out of jail free card". As for my brother, at the very least, his silence would allow him to stay in certain social circles and avoid ostracism from his White peers, and at the most, he believed on some level, through years of learned internalized racism, that there was nothing wrong with it.” - Class of 2024

“Swept under the rug-always! It is not surprising though, we rarely had any conversations about race when I attended FLHS. So why would staff/administrators know how to talk about race if they literally never mention it?”

“I think there needs to be a policy, at the BOE level, that addresses White Fragility. How will the school handle White pushback from parents, students, and colleagues? I believe such a policy would be good to expand the disciplinary approach of restorative justice initiative to helping White people with the White Fragility they may experience.” - Ninth-Twelfth Grade teacher on what they want to see changed within the FPS curriculum, specifically regarding anti-racism and anti-Blackness.

While FPS alleges inclusivity and acceptance as core values to its educational mission, it is apparent that discrimination and harassment are present features of the school climate. To challenge the existence of these harmful realities, we strongly advise that FPS creates an explicit, codified anti-racism policy, which will make clear to all members of FPS that the diversity of the school community is valued and that its faculty and administrators are committed to ensuring the equitable treatment of all students. While the policy should vehemently reject all forms of bias and discrimination, it ultimately must center on race and ethnicity given the prominence of racial discrimination and bigotry in American society. Along with this anti-racist policy, we reiterate the need for a shift in disciplinary policy, away from exclusionary practices towards community-based restorative practices.



In addition to the 56% of respondents to our teacher and staff survey that suggested the implementation of mandatory presentations, courses, and trainings in anti-racism across all grade levels (see Actionable Change No. 3), 12% of respondents suggested the implementation of a investigative reporting team to address issue of racial insensitivity, harassment, or racism in the district.

First, we advocate for the immediate hiring of a restorative justice counselor to serve as a third-party mediator in disputes related to harassment and discrimination within FPS. Second, we call upon FPS to design a restorative justice committee, a permanent and diverse association of students, parents, faculty, and administrators, trained extensively in restorative justice measures. This committee, while not involved in investigations, will gather data on suspensions, expulsions, harassment, discrimination, and other harms that BIPOC students face at a disproportionate rate in our school communities. For legal reasons, students cannot be directly involved in disciplinary proceedings involving other students; however, we propose that students on the committee can analyze anonymized data in order to find patterns and decipher root causes. It is our hope that this shift to restorative practices will create an environment where mistakes are perceived as opportunities for the entire community to grow together, and the creation of the anti-racism policy will embody the value that each student's personality, ability, and background brings to the school climate.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Implement a district-wide anti-racism policy.
- Create a restorative justice counselor.
- Create a restorative justice committee.

ACTIONABLE CHANGE NO. 8

Develop opportunities for cross-cultural and cross-racial collaboration through extracurricular activities within and outside of the Fairfield community.

“It would have been great to integrate the Bridgeport and fairfield [sic] schools more — if at all” - “the only presentation regarding racial, ethnic, religious, etc. bias we undergo as students is freshman year. I think that there should be more presentations implemented into the school-wide “curriculum”. I think that similar presentations in our classes that focus on what we were learning could be beneficial because the teachers have homogenous backgrounds/identities.” - Class of 2021

“It’s hard to consider what extracurriculars would be beneficial when there is a lack of basic racial equality. I would suggest a speaker on racial equality but if their teachers aren’t modeling the proper behavior why would the students?” - Class of 2016 “

From experience in clubs and organizations and state-wide conferences, the more students partner between vastly different demographic schools, the more those students realize that their pre-conceived notions and assumptions are incomplete. They realize they have some common ground and have more in common than they realize.” - Ninth- Twelfth Grade teacher on FPS collaborating with other school districts within Connecticut to promote cross-cultural understandings.

“Many of the problems with education in general center on the fact that we work in silos. In order to integrate our understanding of one another, we need to come together as communities to soften our sharp divisions. We have both geographic and ideological divisions that are only perpetuated in the current climate(s).” - Sixth-Twelfth Grade teacher on FPS collaborating with other school districts within Connecticut to promote cross-cultural understandings.

While students construct an understanding of race through school curriculum, extracurricular activities provide opportunities for FPS students to learn from experience, explore diversity, and become more culturally competent. FPS must establish a community-wide extracurricular environment that transcends the borders of Fairfield, centering equity-focused clubs, inter-school collaboration, and partnerships within the community. We believe that all clubs and organizations should publish written equity plans that prioritize introspection and the inclusion of overlooked narratives within existing extracurricular activities.

We also call upon FPS to allocate long-term funding to create new equity-based initiatives in experiential learning, while increasing administrative support for existing equity clubs. Finally, it is essential that FPS students, administrators and teachers re-examine the socially-complex relationship between FPS and Bridgeport Public Schools, by creating a mutual-enrichment program that moves beyond the white savior narratives that only reinforce cultural divides towards an affinal restructuring of our communities.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Adapt existing FPS extracurricular programs and create new cross-district partnered community programs.
- Require all clubs to create and publicly release racial equity plans.
- Integrate diversity events and discussions into club programming.
- Partner FPS community service groups with those in Bridgeport to foster cultural competency.
- Avoid white saviorism framework and narratives.

ACTIONABLE CHANGE NO. 9

Create a permanent, diverse committee of trained students, parents, faculty, and relevant professionals to inform Fairfield Public School's future curricular and policy decisions relating to race and equity.

"We cannot simply go to lectures on these topics. We must have daily conversations about these issues and educators must be trained to handle these situations and have these conversations" - Class of 2009 on their feelings towards the tools (e.g. bullying assemblies, active bystander lectures) that could allow them to stand up for a peer who faced racial discrimination.

"going back a step we first need to educate students to even be able to identify racial discrimination and bias!!" - Class of 2016 on their feelings towards the tools (e.g. bullying assemblies, active bystander lectures) that could allow them to stand up for a peer who faced racial discrimination.

"I feel like we need to be extremely sensitive to the developmental stages of the students in our charge when discussing racism." - Seventh and Eighth Grade teacher

FPS must make a concerted effort to amplify the voices of marginalized communities within our school system and center conversations on racial equity around the voices in BIPOC communities. We strongly recommend that FPS demonstrates its commitment to anti-racism by establishing a permanent, diverse committee of community and school members to inform future policy and curriculum decisions relating to race and equity. In order to understand the full effects of certain policy implementations, it is essential to include a myriad of perspectives. Brookfield Public Schools in Connecticut recently outlined the role of their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee in their Resolution on Promoting Diversity and Equity for 2020 which can serve as a model for FPS: to support academic and extracurricular activities, monitor the achievement gap between different racial groups, and act as a liaison between students and staff. As Brookfield Public Schools has recognized, in order to meet the needs of all students, FPS must create a seat at the table for young people in every important curricular and policy decision relating to education. Only when students are partners within these conversations and decisions will FPS be able to advance educational equity and adequately support all students.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Create a student and community advisory committee.
 - Develop explicit guidelines to this committee.
 - Refer to Brookfield's model for guidance.

ACTIONABLE CHANGE NO. 10

Establish a detailed, measurable plan for implementation of the actionable changes of this report and maintain a direct, transparent channel of communication regarding progress.

The purpose of this Actionable Change is to highlight our preliminary interpretation of the logistical processes behind all of our recommendations. As we begin discussions with the BOE, Superintendent Cummings, and the Fairfield community at large regarding the content of this report, our recommendations are likely to evolve. However these discussions pan out, FEC is committed to establishing transparent, regular communication and accountability channels so progress towards our ultimate and unwavering goal of achieving racial equity and anti-racism education is realized.

Proposed Timeline

The following timeline is our initial estimation of the necessary amount of time to implement our recommendations, based on our understanding of what is required to actualize each one. We look forward to hearing from the BOE to work through changes to the timeline as needed.

Phase I: 3-6 Months

- Release a policy statement declaring commitment to diversifying educator workforce. (AC4)
- Make a statement asking teachers (especially AP teachers) to de-emphasize the importance of standardized testing. (AC5)
- Have the CHDI conduct an audit of mental health programs. (AC6)
- Encourage staff to do research on social-emotional learning. (AC6)
- Seek out and recruit outside-of-the-district hires to make up a committee that deals with restorative justice. (AC7)
- Make a statement requiring existing extracurricular activities within the district to promote equity in their practices. (AC8)
- Seek out and recruit community members and trained professionals to make up committees pertaining to policy-making within the district. (AC9)

Phase II: 6-9 Months

- Work with FEC and Fairfield community to develop a document with resources for teachers to incorporate anti-racism into the current curriculum. (AC1)
- Update middle school programs (Character Education Program and Seventh Grade Anti-Bullying Program) to be more racially inclusive and informative. (AC3)
- Regularly schedule racial awareness and education programs for students (assemblies, guest speakers, workshops, etc.). (AC3)
- Supplement recruiting and hiring guidelines with a set of interview questions regarding cultural competency and a diversity focused recruiting guide. (AC4)
- Implement regular culturally affirming social-emotional learning programs for teachers. (AC6)

Phase III: 9-12 Months

- Communicate plans for curriculum change as each subject is reviewed and revised in accordance with the 2015-2024 Curriculum Renewal Calendar. (AC1)
- Guarantee that at least one professional is brought in every 6 months to conduct a seminar or period-structured instructional time on race, race education/consciousness, and/or diversity (and plan to extend this to every 4 months). (AC2)
- Hire BIPOC counselors and psychologists (and implement anti-racism and cultural competency training for current counselors). (AC6)
- Hire a restorative justice coordinator to facilitate and monitor disciplinary policies. (AC7)
- Develop a BIPOC teacher recruitment training for local and regional BOE members. (AC4)
- Require a BIPOC educator recruitment and retention plan to be developed by local and regional BOEs to ensure proportional demographics of students to educators. (AC4)
- Require LEAs to submit and publish an annual report describing efforts to diversify their educator workforce and outcomes achieved. (AC4)
- Expand upon the TEAM program by including Black ERGs and EAPs. (AC4)
- Expand upon the teacher mortgage assistance program by supporting affordable housing. (AC4)
- Develop an intensive, trauma-informed program involving mental health practices. (AC6)

Phase V: 1-5 Years

- Eliminate the elementary gifted and talented program and extend the benefits and structuring of those programs such as better resources, tailored instruction, and collaborative environments, to all classes. (AC5)
- Remove middle school math tracking. (AC5)
- Create open enrollment for all high school classes. (AC5)
- Implement a requirement for narrative evaluations of student progress to be included on report cards and provide professional development surrounding these evaluations. (AC5)
- Remove weighted GPA. (AC5)

Final Conclusions

FEC in no way claims to offer perfect solutions to dismantling racism in all of its subtle and overt forms within FPS. Rather, this report is meant to be the first step in democratizing the conversation amongst us, the community, and FPS leaders.

Though we recognize that there is and should be flexibility in the exact implementation of these ideas, FEC remains firmly committed to the overarching goal behind this report: to make FPS a place where all students, regardless of race, feel welcomed and appreciated, and are prepared for a life of continued learning and growth. In the long-term, we hope to push for equity broadly—race is just the beginning.

We understand the temptation to postpone this kind of work. Questions about funding sources, policy transformations, and even coming to terms with our own racial biases surely weigh heavy on any reader of this report, not to mention the additional uncertainty forced upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic. The difficult truth we all must eternalize, though, is that this work cannot wait. None of the district's goals are truly achievable if these reforms are not actualized. To wait means to neglect another class of BIPOC students, subjecting them to inequitable education and consequently implanting what could be a permanent sense of inferiority. To wait means our White students may be ill-equipped to enter our diverse world, harboring implicit biases and misconceptions of their fellow humans. To understand the importance of these reforms but not begin the long process of transforming how race is taught, appreciated, and understood in our school system is an entire dereliction of our educational responsibility to produce thoughtful, inquisitive, accepting, and anti-racist graduates of FPS (*continued onto the next page*).

This report was created over the span of 2020 by a coalition of volunteers who believe in FPS’s commitment to hearing, uplifting, and serving its students. As current students and alumni of FPS, we are deeply grateful for the educational training provided to us by the district. We are not here to claim that our curricula and school infrastructure are broken beyond repair; rather, that our schools share a strong foundation on which we can collectively build a more inclusive, honest, and open environment. By putting these Actionable Changes into practice, FPS and the BOE will substantiate their public statements of harmony and acceptance with the infrastructure and mechanisms to actually achieve these ends, exemplifying the necessary and overdue transformative mission American public education must take towards anti-racism.

We sincerely thank you for your time and consideration, and look forward to advancing anti-racism and racial equity in partnership with FPS, the BOE, and Fairfield community.

