

On Thu, Apr 27, 2017 at 9:42 AM, Ray Lechner <lechnerr@wilmette39.org> wrote:
Hello Emily,

Thank you for asking questions at Monday’s Board meeting. This email is a follow up to your questions regarding our recent work concerning Empathy.

Wilmette District 39 shared the strategic goal “School Climate: Creating a Culture of Empathy” in the fall. Here is a portion of our strategic plan document in which we explain the current situation and the reason for this goal:

School Climate: Creating a Culture of Empathy	
Situation	<p>There is a need to better develop empathy, instill respect, and promote acceptance of responsibility within our school communities. Currently, debates regarding the difference between social conflict and bullying are occurring among a variety of people in and out of the educational setting. Potentially, some situations defined as “bullying” could actually be incidences of typical social conflict for the age group. Education of all stakeholders is in this an area for District 39 and continued efforts should be made in developing a common understanding.</p> <p>The district takes cases of bullying seriously and investigates all reports of bullying. In particular, there have been increased reports of before/after school incidences, racial and/or religious tension, and social conflicts/bullying within social media settings. These incidences are known to have an impact on student attendance as it contributes to social avoidance. Therefore, proactive measures need to be made in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusiveness.</p>

Our focus is on developing empathy for all members of our school community, staff, students, and parents. There is ***no*** training “curriculum,” rather discussions and learning around ***many*** topics such as social conflict, bullying & teasing, social avoidance, diversity among people, and inclusiveness. We want to increase diversity awareness and to encourage the use of empathy as a way to address these

topics that contribute to the school community and culture.

Currently, we have developed a draft of an Inclusivity Statement. D39 has a long history of embracing inclusion. Some of our earliest work involved special education and supporting children with IEPs in the general education classroom. The special education inclusion work D39 spearheaded 20 years ago, is common practice in schools across the nation today.

The draft Inclusivity statement is intended to enhance the communication of our district beliefs as reflected in the district's mission statement: District 39's mission is to nurture, guide, and challenge students to become creative thinkers, collaborators, and socially responsible, compassionate, and productive citizens of a global society. We plan to share a draft (not a final product) publicly in June, or next fall.

Questions: "When will the CRC parent survey results be made available?"

"Why is the district addressing this initiative prior to the CRC's work?"

"What is the context and structure of the conversations among staff, students, and parents?"

Response:

The Community Review Committee will be presenting to the board at the June Board Meeting. At this meeting, they will share a report on the work this year which would include the results of the parent survey. District 39 is working with CRC by being proactive in contributing to the learning process for our staff. However, the CRC report will provide us information that the district will consider when outlining our next steps.

For teachers:

During the August Institute Day, Pat Savage-Williams spoke about engaging in conversations about race, inclusion, and diversity, and preparing ourselves to do so while recognizing our own feelings involved. The audience was D39 staff only and focused more on introspection rather than strategies for students. We are learning together about the world around us.

At our grades 5-8 Teacher Professional Day in April, we held book talks in many different topic areas:

- *Whistling Vivaldi* - Stereotyping and how it affects what we do
- *The Power of Resilience* - How to foster resilience in ourselves and our students
- *Empathy, Why it Matters and How to Get It* - Why empathy is important
- *The Homework Myth* - The purpose of homework
- *The Other Wes Moore* - Fostering high expectations for all students

We also talked about strategies that we could use to help students *if/when* conversations start. Some of these strategies came from Teaching Tolerance and include strategies such as talking circles, checking in with students before/during/after conversations, and teaching students strategies (like keeping their hands down while others are talking) so they have time to listen and think about what others are contributing to conversations. The rest of the day was devoted to grades 5-8 curricular team meeting and having discussions about curriculum, instruction and technology.

For students:

The only curriculum resources used by teachers district-wide is Second Step. Second Step is the social emotional learning resource that we have used for many years. Here is a link for more information:

<http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step>

This year, all that the D39 schools did was to engage students in promoting kindness and connections. The culture of empathy strategic goal goes beyond diversity in terms of race, religion, and gender identity. It is about developing an understanding of one another and promoting inclusivity. Again, there is no curriculum, but a way to help each other be aware and better understand differences.

Regarding SEED PROJECT question:

Although the speaker at the teacher institute day and a couple of Parent Night panelists may be affiliated with SEED, these events were ***not*** SEED sponsored events.

SEED is not our focus, but the group is knowledgeable about and emphasizes holding conversations around inclusivity, diversity and equity. We are not opposed to the organization's goals, however, we have no plans to establish an ongoing professional development partnership with SEED.

Here is more information: <https://nationalseedproject.org/about-us/about-seed>.

Thanks,

Ray

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