



Superintendent
Thomas J. Gibbs, Ed.D.

Director of Curriculum
Thomas Parsons

*Director of Special
Services*
Nathan Young

Director of Gifted Education
Amy Peterson

Our Story – Athens City Schools Addressing Bias & Discrimination

Getting our attention....

At the end of the 2018-2019 School Year an incident occurred between two students that included the use of racial name-calling and resulted in a fight. This brought greater attention to the need to more explicitly address racially based bias and discrimination throughout the District.

Identifying the Need

Survey: A survey that was open to all students, staff, faculty, parents and community was advertised and a link posted to the District website. We received nearly 800 responses and identified in the data clear concerns with perceived bias and discrimination based on the identifiers of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and LGBTQ identity.

Focus Groups: The District hosted a series of focus groups with students, parents and members of the community to discuss in more detail the results of the survey. The additional information gathered in the focus groups helped us to identify the following areas where work was needed:

Modify Biased Policies: Review policies and procedures (student handbooks, discipline procedures, etc.) to identify areas where our practices may be biased against a particular group of students.

Early Grades Education: Establish an early education initiative for all students Grades K-6 to address issues related to *being a member of a community and healthy relationships* (Responsive Classroom).

History of Racism and Discrimination: Identify specific activities to be embedded in the curriculum to provide explicit instruction as to the history of racism, as well as discrimination against other marginalized groups.

Faculty and Staff Professional Development: Provide professional development for faculty and staff in areas related to implicit bias, microaggressions, responding to discrimination, and having difficult discussions with students about curricular topics related to bias and discrimination (i.e. slavery, Japanese internment camps, etc.)

The Response

Elementary Grades - Responsive Classroom: Every teacher in grades K-6 was trained in *Responsive Classroom* and encouraged to use the core practices in their daily class activities. Responsive Classroom is an evidence-based approach to teaching and school climate that focuses on academics, positive community, effective management, and developmental awareness.

Middle Grades – Davison Club: A teacher at Athens Middle School organizes the *Andrew Jackson Davison Club* (Davison was the first African-American attorney in Athens). This club served as a venue for middle school students to engage and discuss issues of prejudice, racism and discrimination. The club also played a lead role in organizing the district's first Black History Month event (see below.)



Athens City School District

Every Learner. Every Day.

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High School - Racial Bias and Discrimination Course: A new course on *Racial Bias and Discrimination* is offered at Athens High School. There were 22 students in the first class. The class is taught by local community members who have been active with the *Racial Equity Coalition of Athens*.

All Staff Implicit Bias Training: Every employee of the Athens City School District attends a half day training on implicit bias led by members of the community active with the *Racial Equity Coalition*.

Social Studies Faculty Training: Middle School and High School Social Studies Teachers have been provided training by *Teaching Tolerance* about how to have difficult conversations on topics related to race in the Social Studies Curriculum. Future training is planned for all teachers on how to introduce topics related to racism into the general curriculum.

Community Partnerships: A number of community groups were formed or emerged in the community around the issue of racial equity. These groups support the district's equity activities. They have created strong momentum and energy for our efforts.

- **Athens Parents for Racial Equity:** The Athens Parents For Racial Equality (AP4RE) was created by a group of parents to provide support and assistance to families in the Athens area. They reached out to the District to begin additional conversations related to concerns and how we can work together to address them.
- **Racial Equity Coalition of Athens:** A broader community group, the Racial Equity Coalition of Athens, (hosted by the *Athens Foundation*) was formed. Members of that group (including the districts, Ohio University College of Medicine, and OhioHealth) co-funded and hosted a *Groundwater Training* with the *Racial Equity Institute* and led conversations about community and school-based activities to address issues related to racial discrimination. Members of the City of Athens Community Relations Committee are also involved.

Book Clubs: The district started a series of book clubs for teachers and students. The book clubs were operated by the *Athens Mediation Services* and all sessions filled up quickly. The District received multiple requests from teachers and students to continue offering these options. Some of the books included *Stamped* by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds, *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, and *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo.

Athens City School Board Resolution: The AP4RE requested that the Board of Education openly support equity work by passing a resolution in opposition to discrimination and bias for marginalized groups of students (see next page), which was passed in December.

A Culminating Experience – First Ever Black History Month Event

The many efforts of the Athens City School District came together in the first ever Black History Month Event in 2020. The event was hosted at Athens Middle School, led primarily by the school's **Andrew Jackson Davison Club** (see above) with many members of the community attending. The district worked with the AP4RE, Racial Equity Coalition of Athens and also the Mt. Zion Preservation Society (a community group supporting the work of renovating and creating a community around the historically black church, Mt. Zion) to create multiple activities for students and the community including several Black History Month celebrations. The Mt. Zion Preservation Society hosted a movie premier for the movie *River of Hope* (about the founding of the first



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Historically Black College in West Virginia) and worked with the District for a special viewing by students with follow-up Q&A sessions with the Director and Actors.

More to Come

Equity Audit: We are planning to have an equity audit done which will support a more formal Equity Plan to be developed and presented to the Athens City Board of Education.

School Restructuring: We are implementing a plan to better serve all students' needs. Instead of two elementary schools with very different student demographics, starting next year we will be serving elementary school age children with a single combined grades 4-5-6 school and two newly configured PK-3 schools. This reconfiguration will allow for greater integration of our student body, which research demonstrates will help support all students in reaching success as they transition to middle school.



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RESOLUTION ADDRESSING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND BELONGING

WHEREAS, the Athens City School District Board of Education understands that discrimination is a structural problem, and not merely an individual mindset or behavior; and

WHEREAS, the Athens City School District Board of Education believes that public schools are fundamental to our democratic society and we must be dedicated to equity and thoughtful teaching of future citizens that racism, bigotry and hatred have no place; and

WHEREAS, the Athens City Schools District Board of Education is committed to creating a safe, equitable, and inclusive environment for all students regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, county of origin or socioeconomic status; and

WHEREAS, a culturally responsive curriculum reflects the history and background of all students, empowers students to value all cultures, not just their own, and mutually benefits and enriches the lives of all students as they become global citizens; and

WHEREAS, research has shown that a culturally responsive curriculum can motivate students of color to a higher level of academic achievement and in many cases increase the graduation rate of previously disengaged students; and

WHEREAS, the path to equity begins with a deep understanding of the history of inequalities and inhumanity and how they have come to impact current society;

NOW, THEREFORE: BE IT RESOLVED, that the Athens City School District condemns, in the strongest possible terms, white supremacy culture, hate speech, hate crimes and violence in the service of hatred; and

BE IT RESOLVED, that the starting point of our work in racial equity must begin with reflection and internal examination of the impact of systemic racism on all students, whereby the Board will look for ways to engage our students, parents, teachers, and community in open and courageous conversations on racism and inequity; and

BE IT RESOLVED, that in keeping with these courageous conversations, within 90 days the Superintendent shall contract with a third party to complete an equity audit of the operational policies and daily practices of Athens City School District and will prepare, in collaboration with community partners, parents, and the consultant an equity plan and recommendations for any policy changes or additions to be presented to the Board of Education for consideration.

BE IT RESOLVED, that this Resolution was passed and all actions and deliberations of the Board of Education relating thereto were conducted in meetings open to the public pursuant to Section 121.22 of the Ohio Revised Code.