

## **What is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Tupper Lake CSD ?**

The recent passage of a resolution calling for the creation of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee by the Tupper Lake CSD Board of Education has sparked a lot of conversation about what it is, what it means, what it's going to do, and why it exists in the first place. This document hopes to answer some of those questions.

One of the more important responsibilities a superintendent has is to make sure that the pendulum doesn't swing too far, too fast in any decisions we make as a District. Rapid, reactive decisions can lead to an instability that doesn't benefit anyone, particularly our kids. Philosophical changes in how we educate our community's kids should be accompanied by a significant amount of thought, input, consideration, and projection of the long-term consequences. That is the underlying goal of the DEI Committee.

### **Let's start with the "why" question first.**

On May 10, 2021, the New York State Board of Regents launched an initiative to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in schools across the New York State. As first steps in the initiative, the Board released a [policy statement](#) and a [draft framework and call to action](#) for all schools in New York State to develop policies that advance diversity, equity and inclusion as a priority in their schools. This committee will provide feedback to the District in the development of our required policy.

### **What will this "DEI Policy" contain?**

Important wording in the policy statement from the NYS Board of Regents is the following: ***"... the contents of such a policy are ultimately matters of local discretion." ... and ... "...encourage and support efforts to create within every school, an ecosystem of success that is built upon a foundation of diversity, equity, inclusion, access, opportunity, innovation, confidence, trust respect, caring, and relationship-building. All students must feel that they are welcome, they belong, and they are supported in every school."***

By engaging in this process, we hope to find ways to reach more kids and make them feel more included in their educational process, and use to the opportunity to promote further conversations about acceptance, inclusion, and societal change.

## **What does the NYS Board of Regents expect us to include in our policy?**

There are six elements that should be addressed in our DEI policy when we have completed it.

- **Governance** – We must establish a district Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee that is representative of all stakeholders, including students.
- **Teaching and Learning** – In every aspect of the way our society functions, we try to avoid relying on the “single story” for complete information. As we go about our everyday lives we collect input from multiple sources and evaluate what each source of information offers to the development of our overall picture. School should be no different. Our students should hear about and see information from multiple perspectives and think critically about how they will incorporate that information into their overall picture.

From the perspective of teaching about American history, it isn't about minimizing, eliminating or reframing any of our history, it's about ensuring that all groups are included in the telling of America's history. In English Language Arts it's about hearing from multiple narrators about their experiences and how they've impacted their world view and the decisions they've made.

- **Family and Community Engagement** – We must ensure that family and community engagement practices are based on mutual trust, confidence, and respect. The development of this policy will take as long as we need to carefully wade through the information and impacts it will have. That will require communicating the progress of its possibly year-long development to you from time to time.
- **Workforce Diversity** – Each district should recruit and retain a diverse workforce in all areas as at all levels, thereby reducing stereotypes and preparing students for an increasingly global society. Tupper Lake CSD is an equal opportunity employer and any time we have an opportunity to become a more diverse faculty and staff, we will capitalize on that opportunity.

- **Diverse Schools and Learning Opportunities** – As is true of many smaller and rural school districts across the State, the makeup of our student body is not something we can change. What we can do is to make sure that we review the language, policies, coursework, policies, programs and activities from time to time to ensure that they are accessible to and meet the needs of our all of our students and our community. This committee is one avenue we can use to do that.
  
- **Student Supports, Discipline, and Wellness** – As per the instructions in the policy statement from the Board of Regents, districts should:
  - Employ programs and practices that enhance all students’ self-identity, self-confidence, and self-esteem.
  - Implement non-discriminatory discipline policies and practices.
  - Focus on the well-being of the whole child by considering and addressing the full range of student developmental pathways.

All of these points are rolled up in the underlying concept of treating each and every individual with respect, empathy, and kindness. We all bring differences with us in the door of the school building every day, some are so minor that nobody notices, some are so significant that nobody can ignore them. Those differences can be a source of unity or a source of division. It is my hope that those differences can be used as a platform for teaching and learning tolerance, inclusion, and acceptance.

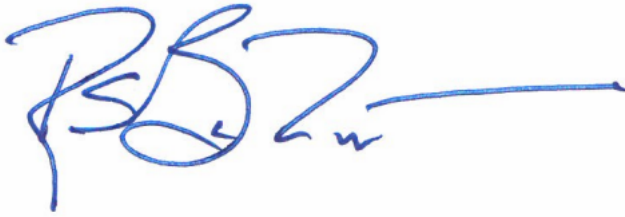
## **Summary**

The New York State Board of Regents has required that all schools in New York adopt a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy. Part of this policy development process includes gathering input from all parts of the school community. The content of the policy is a local decision, and does not require the teaching of any particular topic, theory, concept, or idea. It is important to note that we will not rush to any decision. This will be a well considered, deliberate process with input collected from many groups along the way.

I have already had the opportunity to meet with a few people who have reached out and wanted to discuss this topic, and I would characterize each of those conversations as ‘very productive’. My stance in each of those conversations is

that it should be our goal as an entire community to ensure that TLCSD graduates are well-rounded citizens who are ready to participate fully in an increasingly diverse and global society. It is my goal that this process will help us to refine our policies and practices to make sure we are meeting those needs.

Thanks,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'RBZ' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

Russ Bartlett