

## **Community Conversations about Racism: Why are we here?**

During the 2018-2019 school year, we began a series called Community Conversations about Racism. There has been a call for increased transparency; in an effort to work on this, we want to share some of the experiences that got us to this point.

During two of the sessions in 2018-2019, we had the opportunity to hear from community members about the racism they have experienced at our school. Here are some of the incidents:

A White staff member committed acts of overt racism by continually punishing a Black boy for behaviors that other (White and non-Black) students admitted to also exhibiting. The adult admitted to perpetrating these acts. After the issue was addressed, the resulting intervention was for the child to be removed from that once-weekly class for the duration of the year. The response to this incident is in stark contrast to the response exhibited later, when a Black staff member used the “n-word” and was terminated that day.

A child reported a personal tablet missing from their backpack to a White staff member, and indicated it was last seen near a Black classmate. The White staff member walked to the Black student’s off-campus after school class and asked the Black student about it. It was discovered the next day that the Black student had in fact seen the tablet, and placed it in the locker of its owner for safekeeping. The Black child’s family was not notified that this incident took place until several weeks later.

There are multiple incidents of White students inappropriately and unsafely touching Black students without consequences and without notifying the victims’ families in a timely manner.

A White teacher was planning to utilize a district-supplied text which included the “n-word” and sought out guidance from a White school leader on whether or not this was appropriate for use in the classroom. The teacher redacted the word, however, when a copy was sent home at a parent’s request, the word was still visible. Families were not notified that this text would be used in school. The conversation about the word caused harm to children and families, who were shocked that this occurred in the classroom.

There is a history of non-White families choosing to leave our school to go to other schools in the city. Some of these families have left the school because of the perpetual racism experienced here and have reported as such.

Sharing these experiences helps to ensure that the voices of those who worked so passionately to get us to this point are not erased by their absence. There are more. But some experiences have been purposefully omitted to protect the privacy of students, families, and staff.

*Written by Katie Charner-Laird and Audrey Sturgis, January, 2020*

At the end of the 2018- 2019 school year, the school and district commissioned an Equity Audit from NYU's Center for Strategic Solutions. The following is an excerpt from that Equity Audit.

Negative impressions of the school climate based on either personal experiences or observing the experiences of others. These included:

- A lack of communication and transparency regarding specific incidents of staff bias against students, namely Black children, including, but not limited to one specific incident.
- Disproportionate discipline and targeting of children of color in behavioral consequences.
- An overwhelming lack of representation and diversity in the curriculum
- Concern for teacher and staff preparedness in navigating issues across race and culture.
- Perceptions of a racial divide amongst leadership, teachers, and staff, that has, or could result, in undermining the work of leadership, teachers, and staff of color.
- Perception of a racial divide amongst parents, with views ranging from 'these issues, are just because of one family wanting the principal to be fired' to 'there is a deep divide that intersects race and socioeconomic privilege in the C'port community.'
- Parents reported incidents specific to Muslim parents, not being fully included in the community, mostly offering examples of parent to parent discrimination and bias.
- The vast majority of interviewed parents had questions about the mechanisms for reporting an incident of bias or discrimination they themselves or their child experienced. They asked for clear reporting channels and an understanding of how school and district leadership evaluate and approach a complaint when it comes in.