



# News from the Undoing Racism Committee

## Disproportionality

Based on a review of White Plains' special education data for the 2006-07 school year, the State Education Department (SED) has identified White Plains as potentially at risk for being identified as having a significant disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education and related services, specifically African-Americans. At the recommendation of the Superintendent, Mr. Tim Connors, a Committee was formed to pro-actively conduct a self review of practices and procedures in an effort to make sure the district's practices are equitable.

On September 24, 2008, sixteen members of the White Plains City School District, including representatives from the administration, teachers, support staff, and parents joined Dr. Lillis, the Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Personnel, to begin this self-review. The Committee will use the State's guidance documents and review protocols to guide their comprehensive review. The four focus areas the Committee will review are:

- School-wide approaches and pre-referral interventions
- Referral of students to the CSE
- Individual evaluations of students with disabilities
- Eligibility determinations

The Committee re-convened on November 13 to continue the self review, with the goal of completing the process this school year. Findings and recommendations will be given to the Superintendent to share with the Board and community.

## Recruitment

White Plains Public Schools is sponsoring a district-wide recruitment fair on Saturday February 7, 2009. The purpose of a district-based recruitment fair is to increase the number of diverse applicants to our district. We will sponsor a shuttle to and from the train station for applicants traveling from out of the area. In order to involve the largest number of applicants, we are asking our staff members to send names of department chairs or alumni associations to the Human Resources Department. HR will forward all recruiting materials to the colleges and universities. Registration for the event will be found on the [BOCES QLASjobs.org](http://BOCES.QLASjobs.org) site in December. Please encourage candidates to apply.

## Eliminating Low-Level Courses in Secondary School

A key component of the efforts in the district to eliminate the achievement gap has been to hold high expectations for all students. All students must be expected to meet and be supported in meeting at least the NYS Standards. Over the past three years, this has meant taking incremental steps to eliminate Basic classes at the middle school and Regents Prep classes at the high school. June marked the end of all basic classes at the middle school with the elimination of Basic Math in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. As of September 2008 all classes at the middle school are either grade level or advanced.

At the high school as well, we have gradually been phasing out Regents Prep classes. In September, we eliminated Regents Prep Living Environment, Regents Prep Global History I and Regents Prep English III. In the fall of 2009, we will eliminate Regents Prep Earth, Science, Regents Prep English II, and Regents Prep LOTE III. In the fall of 2010, we will eliminate Regents Prep English I. This will mean that all classes at the high school will be offered only at Regents or Honors/AP levels, by the fall of 2010.

As we have eliminated low level classes, we have seen an improvement in student achievement. We believe that this improvement is related to the heightened expectations and our teachers' implementation of Differentiated Instruction.

**Please email any thoughts or comments to [undoingracism@wpcsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:undoingracism@wpcsd.k12.ny.us)**

The Undoing Racism members are: Cynthia Adams, Susan Altman, Linda Antonion, Shari Bierly, Lenora Boehlert, Imani Bolling, David Cabrera, Jacqueline Cabrera, Joel Chabon, Wendy Dale, JoAnn Doherty, Guerlande Dormeus, Margaret Dwyer, Barbara Falk, Carleen Gilot, Evelyn Gonzalez-Smith, Yvette Morrell, Jacqueline Miller, Sara Montalvo, Bridget Parker, Mary Frances Perkins, Stephanie Rosally, Eugene Rutherford, Michael Salley, Lenora Shoulders, Brian Sullivan, Michael Sullivan, Vilma Caban-Vasquez

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## White Plains City School District

The district's Undoing Racism Committee continues to work on eradicating the vestiges of racism that may exist in our school district. This year the Committee is working on addressing the following:

- Improving our social climate through Cultural Competency Training, People's Institute training, and High School Conference Days.
- Recruiting and retaining a diverse staff.
- Designing and implementing a Professional Development Plan to build skills in areas associated with the elimination of the achievement gap: early literacy, math proficiency that leads to success in Algebra and beyond, and differentiated instruction to ensure that all students meet challenging standards.
- Ensuring early identification of and intervention for the children performing below grade level through systematic assessments in grades KGI, and grade I Literacy Teams.
- Developing strategies to ensure equitable access for all students in programs such as Enrichment, Honors and AP.
- Including students in our committee as members.

### "Common Ground" Workshop

White Plains High School has developed its Staff Development Days this year to align with the District's Cultural Competence Initiative. On three selected days, every member of the staff will attend sessions with facilitators and leaders to discuss how cultural values are reflected in the life of the school. The goal is to explore the school climate as it exists now, and see how each person can contribute to increasing its positive, respectful and collegial aspects. The theme of these workshops will be "*Common Ground*". Common Ground refers to all those things we have in common, including a shared goal to do the best for every student. What we have in common is often more powerful than what divides us.

In addition to the work that the High School staff is doing, High School students met on Election Day, 2008 to discuss Undoing Racism. Twenty young people from various clubs volunteered to come in on their day off to discuss the topic in a workshop format. The SEED club (Seeking Equality and Educational Diversity) sponsored the day, which is part of a series of workshops and overnights that the students will share throughout the year. This November 4th workshop is particularly noteworthy as it was conceived and designed by the students. The club advisor is Wendy Dale, who is a member of the Undoing Racism Committee.

### Report from the Networking Subcommittee of the District's Undoing Racism Committee

This subcommittee consists of JoAnn Doherty, David Cabrera and Jackie Miller. During the year, they have attended workshops given by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, and a Cultural Competence workshop given in the district by Joan Adams. They made connections with the People's Institute, who led a two-and-a-half day workshop in White Plains in the fall.

Teresa Niss advised the subcommittee on some ways to effectively reach out to the community, using the Strategic Planning process as one model. JoAnn met with Frank Williams of the Youth Bureau, and Heather Miller of the Slater Center. David was a contact for Centro Hispano. Jackie has built a relationship with the AntiRacist Alliance in NYC, and attends their monthly meetings.

JoAnn also spoke to a few other schools who are trying to incorporate Undoing Racism principles. Some were as close as Brooklyn; others were as far away as upstate New York. Sharing experiences made for some interesting conversations!

Several members of the Undoing Racism Committee attended the *White Plains West Side Story*, a production at the City Center on May 20<sup>th</sup>. This musical included students from White Plains, our Resource Officers and others. Working on it provided an opportunity for police officers and youth to get to know one another, and come to an understanding of one another's world view. The show was sponsored by the Youth Bureau, funded by a grant, and a lot of fun to watch!

Frank Williams let us know that the Youth Bureau has also been in contact with the People's Institute, who ran a workshop for some of their boys and girls on May 19<sup>th</sup>.

Future plans for the subcommittee include strengthening the bonds we are forming with the organizations mentioned above. We also look forward to forging new relationships with people who are interested in doing this work within the educational community and beyond.