



Racial Justice Academy Recommendations, 2023

**Presented to BSD and community leaders at Capstone Project Presentations July 13th, 2023*

Improving Belonging and Wellbeing for Students of the Global Majority

Teachers are creating toxic learning environments and are targeting students of the global majority in class. This is happening because the Department of Teaching and Learning at BSD isn't prioritizing Black History and best teaching practices in the curriculum, so teachers are relying on BIPOC students.

- 1. The Department of Teaching and Learning needs to provide more curriculum support for teachers in order to avoid curricular harm:** The Department of Teaching and Learning at BSD needs to revamp the curriculum because the current curriculum isn't working. The District needs to offer new curriculum guidance, making sure all new curriculum includes different perspectives from historically marginalized groups and centers anti racism (new topics/new books). Training needs to also include support for teachers on how to cultivate a safe classroom environment so they can teach about race outside of Black History month or MLK day in a way that does not make students feel targeted and unsafe.
- 2. Each school needs to implement and support Equity Advisors:** There is a plan for training and appointing Equity Advisors in the fall. We need it to be easier for students to find trusted adults so students can talk about what they need. Race based harm is a major factor of stress and mental health needs for students of the Global Majority. Equity Advisors will help with following up and communicating after racial incidents occur. Right now students don't know how to report or what happens after they report racist incidents. Advisors will be available for students to report to and help communicate about the follow up. School leaders also don't have consistent routines for checking in with students of the Global Majority about how they are feeling in school. Equity Advisors might be able to help with understanding how students feel in the classrooms and school in general.

Mental Health Needs at School

Students feel that adults don't take mental health seriously because they are more focused on academics, behaviors, and their own mental health/stress. Principals need to prioritize educating teachers about mental health and how to follow up on racist acts instead of letting students deal with that stress on their own.

1. **Each school needs to identify and support adults who can follow up on racism in each building (support Equity Advisors in your building):** Students are feeling the stress when racism is ignored in schools. This is having a major impact on mental health and wellbeing. Students feel ignored when they report to teachers and administrators. The district needs to implement the Equity Advisor program so students have more options to find support when racism occurs at school.
2. **Teachers need ongoing training by professionals on how to understand the impact of ignoring racism at school:** Adults in school need more support on how to follow up when racist acts happen at school. It seems like being late for class has clear and big consequences, but racist acts get ignored. Teachers need to be trained on trauma informed practices and the connection between racism and trauma for students of the Global Majority.
3. **Teachers need ongoing training about supporting mental health needs at school:** Students feel that their mental health is not a priority for teachers and other adults. Students identified genuine *check ins* from teachers, having *breaks* from academics, and *teachers staying calm* as major steps towards fulfilling mental health needs at school. Plans for breaks have been implemented at the middle school level and there is a proposal for the high school from the Engage BHS team.

Welcoming criticism and taking accountability for your actions and The Next Step in Holding Teachers Accountable

Teachers are not held accountable, we think, because leaders are worried teachers will quit. We need to help adults recognize their denial and defensiveness in order to improve student experiences in classrooms and strengthen student relationships with teachers.

1. **Teachers need time and training to build better relationships with students:** Relationships with students is the foundation of a positive learning environment at school. We need to build trust and understanding so that we can feel safe taking accountability when harm happens.
2. **Leaders need a clear tool to hold teachers and each other accountable for anti racism:** This

process needs to be outlined clearly for all members of the community to understand (from students and families all the way to school commissioners). The process needs to feel safe for teachers so that they can hear the feedback, examine their defensiveness, and focus on learning and improving their practice.

3. **Ongoing anti racism training for staff:** This training should focus specifically on the impact of denial and defensiveness as a barrier to anti racism work at all levels of the Burlington School District.
4. **Normalize student power and partnerships to increase respect and relationships:** Power differences impact denial and defensiveness so that when students identify a problem school staff become defensive or deny their role in the problem. If our district needs to normalize student power and youth adult partnerships to help increase respect and strong relationships between students and staff.
5. **Emphasize the Importance Restorative Process for Teacher Accountability** When staff do or say racist things they are not held accountable to the same degree that students are for the same behavior. The district needs a clear and consistent way to hold people truly accountable and create change. The code of conduct states that restorative processes in response to harm are optional. The document should state clearly the impact of opting in on building a stronger relationship and making things right.
6. **Define protocols for what happens when staff cause harm to students:** The Code of Conduct should explain the process with specific steps so those who have been harmed can understand what step people are on (without sharing details) and so people being held accountable understand and are not fearful of owning their actions and learning from their mistakes.
7. **Educate people on the Code of Conduct:** Teachers need to know the process for when they cause harm to students so they do not fear the process. This fear comes from the culture of perfectionism, power hoarding, and denial that currently drives many teachers' reactions when hearing about racial harm they have caused. If we can help teachers learn from mistakes it will help students feel safe giving honest feedback.