

Community Engagement Process Actions

This document provides actions the AAEE Board voted unanimously to approve on March 16, 2023. The actions address the common [findings](#) of the Community Engagement process.

Context

In 2021, the Orleans Parish School Board determined that the name “Benjamin Franklin” did not meet its revised policy for building names. For most of his adult life, Ben Franklin enslaved people. Accordingly, his name on school district facilities was removed by vote of the OPSB. The facility housing Benjamin Franklin High School was renamed for Katherine C. Johnson in honor of her legacy and lifetime achievements as a mathematician and NASA scientist.

Benjamin Franklin High School’s Board of Directors seized this moment as a catalyst to explore issues of inclusion, our values, identity, and legacy as a high-performing public charter school and how best to fulfill our mission of preparing students of high academic achievement to be successful in life.

Through surveys and focus groups, we collected both anecdotal evidence and hard data on the lived experiences of key groups of our school community, including students, alumni, parents, and faculty.

The results of this process have been summarized in the [Stakeholder Engagement Report](#). More information on the Community Engagement process is located on our website [here](#).

Common Findings and Recommended Actions:

1. Continuous need to improve DEI

Action:

1. Direct the new Head of School (HOS) to revisit and update the [DEI Action Plan 2019-2020](#), adding new targets, timelines, and metrics by December 31, 2023.
2. By June 1, 2023, HOS will work with staff to revisit the [DEI Policy](#) and determine if amendments are needed to be presented to the Board.
3. By March 31, 2023, the HOS will establish a small committee of faculty and staff to oversee and guide this work (especially considering the transition to a new HOS).

2. Lack of diversity within curriculum and materials used across content areas

a. Existing Policies and Practices

Discussed in the Response document (linked above). Subsequent professional development has been built around cultural responsiveness in the curriculum - in fall 2020, with training specifically with science faculty (Krystie Barnes); in fall, 2021, with all faculty (Krystal Allen); in fall, 2022, with all staff and a focus on inclusion (Krystal Allen); follow-up with Krystal Allen took place in January 2023, and she intends to follow up with individual departments on DEI.

We have added Asian Studies to the curriculum, which already includes African-American Studies, African-American Literature, and Middle-Eastern Studies. Anecdotally, a new parent who attended "Meet the Teacher Night" called Admissions Director Lynn Jenkins to tell her how meaningful it was to have each of her daughter's teachers talk about the importance of inclusion and "safe spaces" for their students.

b. Actions:

- i. By June 1, 2023, the Head of School will develop a plan with a timeline and metrics for increasing diversity within curriculum and materials used across content areas. It should include:
 1. Training among the faculty and accountability for sharing on a departmental level how they are implementing a culturally responsive curriculum.
 2. Ensuring professional development is aligned with what the teachers' need.
 3. Continued DEI professional development
 4. A budget
 5. Plans for allocating resources (budget) and time for collaboration among faculty/staff
- ii. Twice per year, the Head of School should report out on progress to the Board.

3. Lack of racial diversity of faculty

a. Existing Policies and Practices

The non-discrimination policy and a statement about hiring goals are included in every job posting.

There has been an increase in appointments of People of Color in faculty and senior administrative positions since the hiring decision process was changed in 2019. As stated in the Response document, the goal to attain is representation among faculty that equals the student demographics. The goal has not been met, but when there are opportunities to hire, it is being addressed.

b. Actions

- i. Continue advancing hiring goals, including proactive recruitment.
- ii. Look to better retain teachers of color by:
 - 1. Reviewing recent exit interviews to identify trends and areas that must be addressed.
 - 2. Design a plan to address teacher retention by Fall 2023
- iii. Look to knowledge diversity. Ensure teachers know how to use tools and to accommodate their methods to an appropriate degree.
- iv. Look to recruit student teachers.
- v. Assess teacher mentoring program and identify ways to strengthen it by Fall 2023.

4. Lack of inclusiveness by teachers/staff for students who identify as transgender, gender-fluid or gender non-conforming

a. Existing Policies and Practices

This is addressed in the DEI Policy. Additionally, students' preferred names are now listed in PowerSchool and on students' ID. This carries through to names announced at graduation, as long as there is student and parental consent.

The DEI Policy allows students to file a complaint if a teacher or staff violates the policy. These complaints are followed up on by Assistant Principal of Operations Donald Jackson and Human Resources & DEI Director Kim Owens.

b. Actions

- i. Invite students from the Gender Sexuality Alliance to again address faculty and staff on the importance of recognizing preferred pronouns, and the issues that they face when they encounter discrimination or bias. Invite them to present to the AAEE Board.
- ii. Establish a commitment among faculty members to "name it" when they see or hear discriminatory language.
- iii. Finalize the option of stickers for ID badges.
- iv. Ensure substitute teachers have adequate training and awareness.
- v. Incorporate this issue and the DEI policies and expectations into the orientation/onboarding process as well as the assembly at the beginning of the year.
- vi. Elevate student voices, creating opportunities for them to share and encouraging them to tell their stories in school media.

5. Bullying, discrimination not addressed. Lack of clear policies and consequences for varying forms of discrimination different types of students experienced by peers or faculty/staff - Lack of transparency in decision-making - Lack of trust in processes/accountability.

a. Existing Policies and Practices

- i. [DEI Policy](#) and the [Bullying Policy](#) and [reporting form](#) are listed in the handbooks.

b. Actions

- i. Raise awareness of DEI policies and processes for filing complaints through student assembly, onboarding, and school media.
- ii. Before the 2023/2024 school year, assess the process to identify weaknesses and ways to build trust and improve communication with those who file complaints.
- iii. Include the DEI Policy and the Bullying Policy in Professional Development training and ensure faculty and staff are committed to building trust in the process, including through a commitment to confidentiality.

6. Lack of focus on the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students

a. Existing Policies and Practices

- i. From the [Student Handbook](#) - Homework Policy, Test Deferral Policy, Workload over weekends and holidays policy. Students report violations to the Assistant Principal of Academics, currently David Ferris.

b. Actions

- i. Support the ongoing development of a “tracker” that can help students report emotional needs so that they can be addressed.
- ii. Maintain a robust counseling staff and continue working with intern counselors. Assess the need for funding another social worker or therapist, and advise the Board by Fall 2023.
- iii. Assess the model of assigning counselors by class grade versus by student, and advise the Board by Fall 2023.

7. School not providing direct instruction or learning opportunities to help students learn how to be culturally competent, inclusive, and engage in respectful discourse of differing viewpoints, beliefs, and orientations than their own.

a. Existing Policies and Practices

- i. None, although it is part of the curricular goals for social studies teachers. There are also new state laws requiring that parents be able to know what is being taught in their child’s classes. We have provided this access for several years through the use of Google Classroom.

b. Actions

- i. Identify external programs that can be brought in or incorporated into curricula.
- ii. Consider the adoption of a multicultural class, perhaps included in the Ninth Grade Seminar.
- iii. Make a recommendation to the Board by Spring 2024 at the latest.

8. Some staff feel undervalued and contributions feel underappreciated.

a. Existing Policies and Practices

All staff job descriptions have been reviewed and revised, and each position has a six-month plan and evaluation with their supervisor. Every position includes a statement of professional duties, which includes DEI. These professional duties are part of the evaluation process along with specific job responsibilities.

b. Actions

- i. Provide more opportunities for staff to express their concerns and ideas by having regular staff meetings.
- ii. (Faculty shared that this was a largely COVID-related phenomenon.)
- iii. Explore ways to add mental health resources for faculty.

9. Feelings that certain students receive preferential treatment. Socioeconomic privilege (particularly treatment) shown to students from wealthier backgrounds.

a. Existing Policies and Practices

- i. The Thurber Student Enrichment Fund, now in its second year, provides funding for opportunities that would otherwise not be available due to limited family income. There continues to be ad hoc funding of particular student needs by particular alumni, which is managed by Development Director Christy Read.

b. Actions

- i. Continued education to students, parents, and teachers about the availability of Thurber Student Enrichment Funds, and other ways to fully experience the school's opportunities.
- ii. Continue to write off student course and class fees for families qualifying for Free or Reduced Lunch.
- iii. Ensure Professional Development training addresses this issue, especially relative to promoting transparency and consistency in decision-making for student opportunities.

10. There is a lack of education on who Katherine Johnson was.

a. Existing Policies and Practices

- i. A large banner celebrating Katherine Johnson, with QR codes that provide information and videos about her, has been placed in the atrium since OPSB changed the facility name.
- ii. "At Katherine Johnson Campus" has been incorporated into the school's branding.

b. Actions

- i. *See Below*

11. There is a desire to have a more holistic narrative of Ben Franklin told.

a. Existing Policies and Practices

- i. None

b. Actions

- i. This years' long community engagement process underscored the need to continue advancing and strengthening meaningful DEI policies and initiatives, but it has not shown a desire among a significant majority of stakeholders across groups who participated in the community engagement process to change the name of the school. However, it has revealed a need to provide the appropriate context and to ensure that every student feels more welcomed, valued, and included in the school community.

Individuals in the stakeholder advisory group with opposing views on changing the name agreed that, perhaps, decoupling “Franklin” the person from “Franklin” the school could be an appropriate strategy for addressing the issue raised by OPSB’s renaming of the building.

Thus, we recommend engaging experts to work with students to research and design a way to tell the expanded story of Franklin the person as well as Katherine Johnson the person. We had exploratory conversations with the Historic New Orleans Collection, and its experts are willing and eager to lead this partnership.

In the same vein, we also recommend de-emphasising “Franklin the person” on the physical campus, including, perhaps, moving the statue and artwork of Franklin that is prominently displayed in the atrium – and adding context and an interactive element to tell a more complete history.

Likewise, we recommend elevating Katherine Johnson’s legacy on campus and raising awareness of her contributions to this nation through programming, such as, for example, panel discussions and movie screenings.

Again, we advise that these decisions be guided by professional historians in collaboration with faculty and students as part of a course exercise - in a marriage of the past with the future - to be completed by the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

- ii. The Marketing Committee will develop brand standards to formalize and incorporate Katherine Johnson in school marketing, visual identity, and collateral material.

- iii. Marketing Committee to consider tactics for addressing “I am Ben Franklin” and other legacy marketing campaigns and materials.

Policy Documents:

1. [DEI Action Plan 2019-2020](#)
2. [Response](#) and Action Plan to Student Meeting with Board in July 2020.
3. [DEI Policy](#) approved by Board in August 2020.