



Guidelines for Supporting Staff with Diverse Backgrounds

As our [Strategic Plan](#) notes, Lexington Public Schools “strive[s] for staffing that is reflective of the diversity of our community.” As we work toward that goal and increase the numbers of staff who come from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups, especially those groups that continue to have limited access to socio-political equity in our schools and beyond, we must work to differentiate our support of these staff members, as their experiences in the Lexington Public Schools have the potential to be substantially different from staff from traditionally represented groups.

This document provides some recommended best practices for supporting staff from diverse backgrounds, and these recommendations should be coupled with an understanding that every staff member is an individual with individual preferences. The most important component of this work is to get to know your staff and support them in the way they need to be supported. Please reach out to the [Asst. Superintendent for Human Resources](#) or the [Director of Equity and Student Support](#) with questions or for consultation.

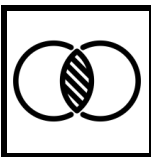
Reference Materials

- [January 2020 Joint Council Slideshow](#)
- [Guidelines for Promoting Diversity in Hiring](#)



Mentors & Affinity Groups

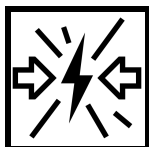
LPS has a robust mentoring program for new staff, yet staff from historically marginalized groups may need differentiated support. Discuss openly with the new staff member whether matching aspects of identity in a mentor is important for them, which may actually require multiple mentors if the current pool lacks diversity. LPS has also worked to provide affinity spaces for staff members from historically underrepresented groups to come together in solidarity and support. Ensure that all staff know of specific opportunities for [affinity groups](#), including the [Employees of Color Affinity Group](#) and additional groups that support different racial/ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ staff, and more. Staff also have access to [the MAALANA group](#) for area school districts run by [IDEAS](#). During the 2024-2025 school year, the formal mentoring program is piloting an [Affinity Support Program](#) for short-term coaching and support. Since it is unlikely that supervisors know every aspect of their staff’s identity, a good practice is to share opportunities with all staff, allowing them to opt in when they choose. As you get to know your staff more familiarly, it may be appropriate to reach out to individual staff with specific opportunities.



Acknowledge the Difference

It is important to avoid the cultural erasure that some staff members from diverse backgrounds experience in our schools. Erasure happens when we fail to acknowledge the work experience for historically marginalized identities will be different than their counterparts. Explicitly state to these staff, as well as their colleagues when appropriate, that they were hired first and foremost because they are talented educators. The diversity of background, experience, and identity that they bring to

our staff is also of tremendous value. They must hear that their voice in both arenas is valued, but that their voice as an educator is the only one that is expected. Be clear that your goal for support for their identity is to help them stay true to who they are rather than assimilating them into the dominant culture--and then welcome feedback when your actions do not match this goal. Teaching Tolerance has some good ideas to consider in this article: [“Anti-Racist Work in Schools: Are You in It for the Long Haul?”](#)



Challenging Interactions

Make sure that staff know they have several options available if they encounter challenging interactions with students, families, or colleagues that stem from their identity within a historically marginalized group and that the district will believe them and support them. They may face unintentional harm as a result of microaggressions or more explicit oppression in their interactions with others. They can report issues to a supervisor, a building principal, the Director of Equity & Student Support, the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, or their union leadership. In most cases, the administrator will partner with the staff member to determine next steps, including whether they would like their report to remain anonymous. The affinity groups mentioned above can also provide needed support in these situations, as well as the pilot [Affinity Support Program](#), which addresses needs that are specific to an educator's identity and interactions and experiences that are challenging because of their lived experience.



Professional Learning

Think critically about the support we offer staff when providing professional learning opportunities that focus specifically on marginalized elements of identity that are represented by our staff. For example, if a department meeting will include a discussion about the need for racially diversifying the curriculum, previewing the content with staff of color can be helpful, especially when coupled with an explicit acknowledgement that this work has the potential to impact them differently than their colleagues. Likewise, following up with the staff member following the meeting can be meaningful. Most importantly, welcome the feedback in both instances, but do not expect or require it. As noted above, the [Director of Equity and Student Support](#) can be a helpful resource as you build your own capacity and develop professional learning opportunities for your staff. The district Professional Learning Program also offers several courses and workshops each year aimed at supporting staff at all levels of experience with this work.



Avoid Taxation & Tokenization

Too often in schools, marginalized adults are levied with a cultural taxation when a staff member is given invisible labor solely on the basis of identity. For example, a gay counselor may be asked to work with all the students struggling with their sexuality or a teacher of color may be asked to join all the committees focused on diversifying curriculum. In many cases, this also results in a tokenization of the staff member's identity, essentially being asked to represent their group simply because there are so few staff members available to do so. In most cases, these issues can be avoided by openly communicating with the staff member about their desire to be a part of these endeavors. As noted in our [Strategic Plan](#), LPS recognizes “that people from different backgrounds offer new ways of seeing the world and solving problems,” so the inclination to include staff with diverse backgrounds is appropriate; however, the staff member must be a willing participant in agreeing to take on these roles. If another staff member who does not share that identity could rightly refuse to participate without impunity, the same should be true for employees from diverse backgrounds.