

Fairfield City Schools
Diversity Plan
2011 - 2015

Editor: Mark S. Giles, Ph. D.

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Fairfield City Schools

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Dear reader,

- “We believe that a strength of the Fairfield City School District is our expanding culturally diverse population.”
- “We believe that all children can learn and achieve to their full potential.”

These two belief statements adopted by the Fairfield Board of Education several years ago form the basis of our equity work in the Fairfield City Schools.

Our students, and their families, represent many backgrounds and cultures. We work to promote an atmosphere of acceptance, and we take action in the face of prejudice and discrimination. We believe that diversity empowers great schools, and great communities.

We have been working for several years to provide training to our staff that ensures we translate these fundamental beliefs into daily practice in our schools and classrooms. In order to accelerate this process, and to build accountability at appropriate places, we needed a plan.

To that end, we engaged the services of Dr. Mark Giles, associate professor of Educational Leadership from Miami University, who served as a consultant and the editor of our work. Dr. Giles encouraged us to involve many stakeholders in writing goals, strategies and action steps to turn our vision into reality. We put out the call for writers and many responded. Parents, support staff members, administrators, teachers, and community members wrote over several months in Spring 2011. The result is this powerful plan.

As the chief executive officers of this school district, we are committed to the execution of this plan. It is truly the roadmap towards our vision. But as with any journey, we will likely need to speed up in places, slow down in others, and create detours around the unexpected. That makes this plan a living document which will evolve in response to real life in our school district, our community and our society. But the fact remains that we will journey forward to better “live, learn, and work together in a vibrant and diverse world.”

Cathy Milligan
Outgoing Superintendent

Paul Otten
Incoming Superintendent





Equity Leadership Team

- Diversity related policy issues (review of strategic goals, professional development needs, curriculum changes)
- Clearinghouse for district-wide diversity initiatives
- Manage listserv or newsletter for diversity events
- Produce annual report

Diversity Plan & Implementation Process 2011-2015

FCS Superintendent accountable for leadership and implementation

- Recruit, hire, retain teachers, administrators, and staff of color
- Increase and improve cultural competency of all teachers, administrators, and staff
- Improve communication with community regarding diversity initiatives
- Develop student engagement and learning opportunities regarding diversity

Community Diversity Alliance

- Community engagement & parental involvement
- Forum for community based diversity conversations

Building Diversity Alliances

- School building specific diversity programming and activities
- Student engagement with diversity activities
- Parent study & discussion groups
- Guest speaker series

Diversity Mission Statement

Teaching our children, and ourselves, to live, learn, and work together in a vibrant and diverse world.

Diversity Vision Statement

To be the premier public school district in Ohio, providing an excellent education to all students. We will have a staff that reflects the racial and cultural diversity of our community and our student body. We will build trusting relationships with all students and their families, establishing our school district as the recognized leader of equitable community engagement in Ohio. We will develop and support culturally competent, transformational leaders who exhibit cultural awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and skills. These leaders will create inspirational learning experiences that encourage and motivate all students and staff to achieve their highest levels of performance.

The Importance of Diversity for Fairfield City Schools

The Fairfield City School (FCS) District receives ratings of excellent from the State of Ohio Department of Education and prides itself on providing high quality teaching and instruction for all students. However, as the racial and ethnic populations have changed around Fairfield and Butler County, FCS has not kept up with the pace of reflecting the diversity of its shifting populations across its ranks of teachers, staff, and administrators. Several internal reports (see appendix A) indicate the desire for change to serve growing populations of students of color and better prepare all students for diverse collegiate and professional work environments. This plan represents a first step in developing an evolving, robust blueprint to shape the future diversity actions of the district. This plan consists of four main pillars developed through extensive conversations with and collaboration among members of the FCS staff and Fairfield community: (1) recruit, hire, and retain teachers, administrators, and staff of color; (2) increase cultural competency of all teachers, administrators, and staff; (3) increase outreach for diverse community engagement and parental involvement; (4) increase student engagement with diversity-change process. This document represents collaborative work of many members of the FCS staff and community members. Through the engagement process of many meetings and conversations about diversity, new ideas formed and commitments developed that will help facilitate the evolving implementation of the suggestions and strategies outlined here.

Goal I:
Recruit, hire, and retain teachers, administrators, and staff of color

Short-term strategies (3 months-1 year):

- Develop new partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Hispanic Serving Institutions, and strengthen existing partnerships with local universities focused on conducting targeted recruiting and hiring initiatives for graduating students of color (undergraduate and graduate level students). Appoint a FCS staff member (teacher or administrator) to serve as a liaison between colleges, universities, and FCS for future diversity focused employment opportunities.
- Review all current FSC recruitment and hiring practices for indications of unintentional or intentional bias or exclusionary practices. Establish an oversight committee or use re-purposed Equity Leadership Team to make recommendations to Curriculum Director and Superintendent on recruiting and hiring racially and ethnically diverse teachers, administrators, and staff. Review language of job descriptions to ensure optimal focus on diversity knowledge, skills, and backgrounds of candidates.
- Establish policy and procedure of district wide diversity orientation for all building leaders and interview committees. This includes developing a consistent process for screening and interviewing job candidates that includes questions and scenarios relating to diversity and equity. Develop process of selecting diverse staff to serve on all committees. Invite Community Diversity Alliance members on screening and/or hiring committees.

Long-term strategies (1-3 years):

- Discuss diversity issues and goals during bargaining sessions with unions regarding seniority system in current contract
- Develop partnerships with local community organizations; faith centers, regional/national organizations (e.g., Urban League, NAACP, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce)

Rationale for goals:

Recruiting rationale: the rationale behind the decision to create a standing diverse pool of candidates was to have a vehicle in which to pull potential candidates of color. Building leaders and District leadership who hire candidates, would have additional resources, contact information, and a list of potential candidates from which to include into the selection process. This diverse pool of candidates should mirror the Fairfield City Schools demographics.

Hiring rationale: Increasing the racial and ethnic staff by 2% in the short term was a very small number but our team agreed to this number for the following reasons:

- District budget constraints
- Overall economy
- 2% is an obtainable goal and the percentage is for the entire district and should be spread out evenly throughout the district.

Retention rationale: We wanted to demonstrate that the need for staff of color was an important component of the Racial Equity Action Plan and that every teacher hired under this plan is valued.

Goal II:

Increase cultural competency of all teachers, administrators, and staff

Short-term strategies (3 months-1 year)

- Provide professional development training in relationship development for all teachers and staff (1 per year). Provide cultural competency training for all new staff members during new teacher orientation (e.g., *Woven Traditions*, or other diversity training program or diversity consultant)
- Develop a cultural liaison team for each building site
- Develop a district-wide multicultural awareness brochure, getting input from existing research and community members (e.g., changing demographics in Fairfield and Ohio, cultural perspectives on communities of color within Fairfield) and make it available in English and Spanish.

Long-term strategies (1-3 years)

- Offer voluntary summer professional development programming in cultural competency
- Create a library of non-fiction literature and on-line resources for teachers to implement on cultural competency
- Create and administer in-house survey to capture and measure data on diversity related issues such as staff perceptions, cultural belief systems, cultural self-assessment, and levels of trust among teachers, administration, and staff members.

Rationale for goals:

We believe that informed and equitable relationships are the foundation for all learning and understanding between community members. Without establishing trust and relationships, the growth in cultural competency will not be effective. The long-term strategy of developing a useful, reliable survey instrument will allow teachers and staff to record and become more aware of their own cultural assumptions, and how those assumptions might affect others. The surveys will allow measurable information to be analyzed in order to gain a better understanding of the district's culture, beliefs, and values. This information will become the basis of knowing where staff and teachers stand with an understanding of cultural competency and relationships. The survey will be a measuring tool to help shape the types of training the district will need.

We believe that cultural competency training should first allow individuals to get to know where they stand in regards to their own culture, beliefs, and values. For example, *Woven Traditions* allows for a deeper understanding of self through activities and curriculum that will in turn allow individuals to build acceptance and understanding of others' culture, beliefs, and values. This direction of training provides most benefit based on where we are in the process of becoming more inclusive. We also believe that individuals are at different places with their knowledge and understanding; therefore, professional development should be differentiated to meet the needs of each particular building. We also believe that professional development classes need to be provided not only during the school year, but possibly in the summer too. In conversation with a wide range of teachers, staff, and community members, accountability for new perspectives and actions became an important factor for long-term success. We feel it is important for all staff to take ownership of change and diversity goals. The creation of committees within each building can also hold individuals accountable for implementing cultural competency within the classroom and providing ideas for individual and school growth. We believe it is important for the teachers, staff, and community to feel ownership in the positive direction of bringing cultural competency within the schools. The cultural liaison team/committee can become

part of the activities of each Building Diversity Alliance. The team will discuss issues facing the individual schools and continue to make strides in creating an environment that is welcoming and enriching for all members of the community. The cultural liaison team will also look at creating a cultural awareness brochure that allows for insights into different cultures to inform and promote positive engagement. This same group will also help in the development of resource rooms where staff can go to find ideas and lessons for bringing cultural competency within the classroom.

Goal III: Increase community engagement and parental involvement

Short-term strategies: (3months-1 year)

- Develop a Parent of Color Networking group. Involve the Building Diversity Alliances in populating the networking group.
- Establish school Parent Ambassador Program to welcome all new parents into FCS community and develop school related relationships that focus on transition issues, community resources, and support for helping parents help their students.
- Distribute information about the diversity within our school community at Open House programs by creating a community resource handbook. The handbook could include educational, cultural, and social service resources relevant to parents and community members.
- Inform parents about the cultures represented in our school and the resources available for collaborating with the school. Develop effective ways to follow up with families who do not attend Open House to share information and find out their interests and needs related to helping their students succeed.
- Offer alternatives to evening events (i.e., weekends). Many families work evening hours and cannot attend usually scheduled events. Changing and/or altering when events are offered could result in the participation of different groups of parents and community members
- Incorporate feature stories/profiles about our families and community resources in monthly district newsletter. Make it available in different languages.

Long-term strategies: (1-3 years)

- Make school events more family friendly and accessible by providing childcare for occasions when parents are invited to the school.
- Develop a process to inform all parents that they can receive communications about their children from the school in their native language. FCS already provides translation services for parents if the parents request it. Openly advertise and offer this service before receiving a particular request.
- Develop resources to facilitate school staff involvement with families of color through such activities as community based tutoring services, home visits, and community picnics.
- Enhance the district's web site to be more inclusive, representative, and informative about the diversity in our schools and provide information in several languages.
- Invite more parents to become involved with FCS efforts to close the racial achievement gap. Share data on racial achievement gap with parent groups and develop ways to collaborate on solutions.

Rationale for goals:

The goal team III consisted of a number parents, community members, and FCS staff that had been part of cultural celebrations held at one or another of the Fairfield Schools. According to anecdotal reports, these events were well received by all, including the parents and families of color who felt appreciated and valued, and who were excited to learn about the diversity in our schools. Additionally, our goal team included district personnel who had been involved in prior work on community engagement, and some ideas from that forum were woven into the three goals.

The three themes of goal team 3 goals include: 1). Make the schools inviting places to be through developing a parenting network, and broadening formats for school and home interactions; 2). Inform our community (in the broadest sense) about the cultural and ethnic make-up of our schools as a way to

both educate and appreciate; 3). Give parents ideas for resources and provide parents with greater school accessibility so they can have more opportunities to be involved with their child's education.

Goal IV: Student engagement with diversity change process

Short-term strategies: (3 months-1year)

- Create student diversity alliances at middle school and high school levels to begin to develop culturally competent student leaders. Building leaders will select student volunteers and draw from existing student leadership groups for participants. The selections must reflect the diversity make-up of the building as a whole.
- Improve teacher to student relationships through attention to emotional intelligence theories and practices. These theories emphasize the importance of relationship building and empathic connections with others.

Long-term strategies: (1-3years)

- FSCD will create a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) program that will span from elementary through high school to increase the pipeline of diverse students interested in pursuing these academic and professional areas.
- Identify, hire, and train teachers who can assist in developing and teaching in the STEM program. This might initially include volunteers who work professionally in STEM areas.
- Develop greater participation in advanced level science and math courses by all groups of students.

Rationale for goals:

Students who engage in curriculum and extra-curriculum activities are more likely to display a positive attitude about school and get better grades. FSCD has many examples of student engagement and academic achievement and school pride. Some such examples are Visions, our athletic programs, and the theatre and music programs. Additionally, parents of students in those programs are strong supporters of the District. However, many of our students do not connect with the District. The goal IV committee members discussed three primary reasons that the connection to school is not happening. These reasons include (1) a lack of programs that address a variety of learning styles of many students, (2) a lack of support from teachers, administrators and other support staff and, (3) too few opportunities that allow students to come together and discuss those issues that are particularly important to them.

The committee developed three goals that will result in improved academic performance and school pride amongst all students.

- Provide professional development opportunities for teachers to learn about Emotional Intelligence and using it to focus on diverse student learning styles. This could strengthen connections between building professionals and their behaviors and student academic success.
- Establish student-led "Diversity Alliances" at the middle and high school levels. This Connection between students could help them develop skills for improved social interactions and culturally competent leadership.
- Provide opportunities for more students to access advanced level math and science classes beginning at the elementary level and continuing through high school. Use a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) approach to teaching and learning that incorporates math and science in problem-based activities. Student cohorts will progress through this program beginning in middle school through high school.

Consultant Recommendations

Goal I:

- The larger goal of increasing teachers, staff, and administrators of color should be considered a high priority for the district over the next 3-5 years. Intentionality and action are the key concepts to making this goal more than a talking point. When considering the changing demographics of Fairfield and the low representation of teachers, staff, and administrators of color currently employed, the public message seems to convey that although Fairfield City Schools receives ratings of excellent for its academics, it is behind the times and lacking when it comes to mirroring the surrounding community and utilizing the full benefits of a diverse workforce. FCS should strive to remain excellent in academics and become excellent in the area of diversity.
- In the short term, the Superintendent should consider identifying experienced professionals of color who work in the STEM areas (e.g., Chemists, Information Technology/Computer Programmers, Engineers, etc.) for area corporations and universities. The objective is to recruit, and hire them to teach science, technology, engineering, and math courses part-time. Southwest Ohio has many major corporations where professionals of color work and who might have this type of interest. Some university professors have interests in working in K-12 settings, but often do not aggressively look for those opportunities. If some of the professionals have aspirations of changing careers, then the Board and Superintendent could consider alternative certification processes to hire some of those qualified professionals as fulltime teachers.
- For 2011-2012, a strong effort should be made to contact, visit, and establish relationships with university department chairs and teacher education program coordinators at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions, as well as the major universities in Ohio (e.g., The Ohio State University, University of Cincinnati, Bowling Green State University, Kent State University). The objective is to target emerging teachers of color who might have an interest in applying for positions with FCS. This partnership building process could create a long-term pipeline of potential new teachers of color from a wider range of universities.
- To accomplish the goal of diversifying the FCS workforce, a reasonable amount of funds should be allocated and earmarked annually to support diversity related outreach and recruiting. These funds represent the level of commitment the district has regarding increasing diversity among its staff and all other diversity related initiatives.
- Develop informational sessions for community members, especially community members of color, about the civil service exam and requirements. Since many entry level and administrative staff positions require the civil service exam, the only way to encourage more applicants of color for those types of jobs will be to publicly inform target populations about process, procedures, timelines, and any exam preparation opportunities, which might increase the yield of qualified applicants of color.

Goal II

- Increasing the cultural competency of all teachers, administrators, and staff and making FCS a more welcoming environment for diverse groups of students and parents exists as a primary objective of any short or long-term diversity plans. The theme of cultural competency echoed across several Community Diversity Alliance meetings and Equity Leadership Team meetings. More attention is needed in this area and could be accomplished with professional development (PD) sessions that target these issues to offer knowledge, skills, and resources for teachers and

staff to serve diverse populations better and to facilitate the goal of increasing the diversity of the staff over the next few years. With consideration for the limited number of professional development opportunities each year, some thought should be given to how switch or transfer topics of expected PD sessions rather than adding more to the yearly total.

- Relationship building represented another strong theme emerging from several meetings. Attention is needed on the types of relationships being built and for whose benefit. What is the intent of building better relationships? Is it to maintain the status quo? Is it for the majority group to feel better about diversity changes? A major part of diversity work is change; some changes are uncomfortable and take time. This means getting out of routine behaviors and comfort zones and embracing the benefits of new representations, new perspectives, and doing some things differently. There should be a focus on recruiting and hiring diverse teachers and staff even if that makes certain individuals uncomfortable. There is also a value in learning ways to enhance excellent culturally competent instruction to students and services to the increasingly diverse community. Some of that work will result in periods of adjustment and possibly instances of resistance to change.

Goal III

- FCS conducts open house sessions and other welcoming activities for new and returning students and their families. Should this be offered as one-size-fits-all activities? More attention is needed on what various groups of students and their parents require to learn about the school district and local community. Creating a simple survey for new and returning parents could provide useful information about how to structure the annual or quarterly events to serve all participants. For example, should the activities be in the weekday evenings, when many parents must work their primary or secondary jobs, or should some alternative activities be offered on a weekend? What types of information and services are structured for Spanish and other non-English as first language speaking populations?
- Provide more opportunities for diverse parents to become engaged in the life of the school district. Some parents will respond positively to direct invitations rather than a general brochure or announcement on the Website. Develop intentional outreach activities that target diverse groups of parents to join the work and activities of the school district.

Goal IV

- Invite middle and high school students, especially students of color, to play a direct role on committees and with activities that advance diversity across the district. Often the students will know what is going on in ways adults do not. Inviting students to directly participate and have their voices heard by decision makers could result in new perspectives and increased levels of school citizenship.
- Provide additional opportunities for greater numbers of students to benefit from advanced placement and/or honor level academic activities. All students have various gifts and talents and to nurture their growth, support is needed that encourages them to learn new material and exercise those gifts and talents. If the leadership vision includes the concept that all FCS students are honor students in different ways, that might lead to more engagement and higher aspirations.
- Encourage teachers to maintain high expectations of all students and develop ways to promote both academic excellence and diversity excellence simultaneously. Develop stronger parent-teacher alliances that can add value to the diversity goals of the district and the learning goals of the student. Forming student diversity alliances for middle and high school students, if

properly structured and led, could result in greater learning outcomes in the classroom and greater gains in maturity and valuation of local, national, and global diversity.

Lastly, some thought should be given to hiring or appointing someone who can help implement the short-term and long-term goals and strategies listed in this plan. This is an evolving process and a flexible plan that is not the final word on this work. Asking hard working, busy professionals to do more, and more, can cause predictable frustration and resistance. The person in question, if currently employed, might have their duties slightly re-adjusted to allow for focus on working with the superintendent, assistant superintendent, principals, teachers, and staff to prioritize and launch the new initiatives that will bring about increased diverse representation and levels of cultural competency supported by all of the participants who contributed to this work. If the person is a new hire, say for a newly created position, more time and thought is needed to shape the scope, scale, and level of that person's work over the long-term. Either way, there is momentum for this diversity work in the Fairfield City Schools. With focused, intentional, committed effort, FCS will gain the distinction as excellent in diversity while maintaining its reputation as excellent in academics.