



Walking the Talk: A Courageous Approach to Honoring Diversity

Thomas W. Pyle Middle School
Bethesda, Maryland

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School Facts

- Public Middle School
- Approximately 1,300 Students
- Bethesda, Maryland (affluent suburb of Washington, D.C.)
- 134 Professional Staff (84 Teachers)
- 80% White, 3% African American, 11.4% Asian, 5.5% Hispanic/Latino

The Crisis

- A pattern of racial intolerance surfaces
- African American students are subjected to racially insensitive/abusive language from white students

Core Values

- The staff members at Thomas W. Pyle Middle School are committed to:
 - Demonstrating a passion for learning
 - Encouraging academic and personal growth
 - Sustaining a nurturing and respectful environment
 - Honoring diversity

The Problem with Diversity Programs

- Focus on helping white children take on the perspective of minority students without acknowledging their own perspectives
- Invalidate the experiences of white students
- Ignore the stages of white racial identity development
- Offer “off-the-shelf” or canned approaches that are not customized to the school
- Focus on tolerance versus resisting false notions of superiority and embracing diversity
- Often result in creating a backlash against anti-bias efforts and actually cause students to become more entrenched in their resistance to anti-racist ideology

Three-Pronged Approach

- Staff
- Students
- Other stakeholders

Staff Initiatives

- County teaching for equity course
- Summer leadership team training
- Study circles
- Staff Development that addresses race, culture, and the achievement gap

Student Initiatives

- Focus groups and facilitated conversations
- Developing a Character Education Program that focuses on:
 - Developing authentic identities based on personal abilities and interests
 - Promoting comfortable and empathic interactions with people from other races
 - Identifying and challenging stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination
 - Building capacity for caring, cooperative, and equitable relationships with others

Stakeholder Initiatives

- **Study circles**
 - Facilitate honest, productive, discussions
 - Develop greater understanding of cultural differences and the effect of race and culture on teaching and learning
 - Create action steps for change
- **Community meetings**
 - Share information
 - Seek feedback
 - Promote involvement

Results

- Awareness
- Dialogue about race

On-going Challenges

- “The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”

- Marcel Proust

Summary Points

- Key Learning's
- Challenges Ahead