

August 14, 2020

Convening Notes (virtual). The recording is [here](#).

9:00 – 10:30am, appx. 125 attendees

Requests

- Please keep an eye out for a survey from us in the next week or so. We will use it to determine how to move forward with these convenings.
- Recommendations for books on race that can be read with elementary schoolers.
- Suggestions for school-aged child care, in addition to pre-school aged child care. Many families may be in need of childcare for the three days per week of distance learning. Any suggestions please email mdebellis@sbscharter.org.

Resources

- Link to the recording is [here](#).
- Circles of Control and Influence
 - <https://images.app.goo.gl/m7Y14kuCtN3j45wv8>
 - <https://youtu.be/tD0aFzkFrFA>
 - <https://youtu.be/DVNpd7E7ltU>
- Identity Wheel – **Attached** (used by Amanda Parshley, Social Studies teacher at Harding HS)
- Charmaine Tourse's slides (middle school) and Yenny Toone's (early childhood) slides – **Attached**
- [Grading for Equity](#) by Joe Feldman
- [Mentimeter](#) is a great resource for opening and closing remote classes
- Rethinking Schools: <https://rethinkingschools.org/>
- [Teaching Tolerance](#) has resources for all levels about starting conversations about race
- So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Olu
- Invitation to Brave Space by Micky Scottbey Jones
- Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People by Mahzarin R. Banaji
- Cultivating Genius by Gholdy Muhammad
- White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo – If you want to join Charmaine Tourse's team reading this as part of their book group, email Charmaine at CTourse@StamfordCT.gov
- Tell Me Who You Are - Winona Guo & Priya Vulchi (Collection of stories about race throughout the country written by two young people)
- Teaching for Joy and Justice by Linda Christensen
- Stamped from the Beginning by Ibram X. Kendi
- Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi (student version of Stamped from the Beginning)
- Just Ask by Sonia Sotomayor

Share-Outs

LaShante' James, Assistant Principal, Brien McMahon High School, Norwalk Public Schools

- Have trained over 60 NPS employees, by end of summer over 100 people trained. 12 people are certified to conduct RP training. Looking at policies and protocols so they're restorative.

- Grading For Equity by Joe Feldman. Emphasizes conferencing with kids, giving them second chances, giving them supports based on their needs.
- Will hold Restorative Nights starting in October. Have a committee on this so they can decide what Restorative Nights will look like. Can do problem-solving fishbowls. Utilizing circles for community building.

Amy Jeffereis, ASPIRE Program Director, Family & Children's Agency

- Entire staff has been trained in RP and the entire program is shaped around RP. Their aim to look at each child as an individual with different needs. Have built a safe space where kids are allowed to fail, and are also accountable for their actions. During COVID-19, have held virtual one-on-ones with each student; we don't start working with the kids until there's a sense of belonging and safety with us. This summer's in-person program started with a circle every day.
- In all activities we give the kids a voice and a choice. There are a few non-negotiables like no cell phones during program. Each classroom develops their own code of behavior for their classroom. Have an advisory board that works with the students, held twice a month. They respond to different issues going on in the program, speak to their peers about what would be better. Even down to the kids making their own (healthy!) snack list.
- Built a mindfulness room, art supplies, beanbag chairs.
- Built a family based on respect and mutual listening. This all starts with the staff.

Amanda Parshley, Social Studies Teacher, Warren Harding High School, Bridgeport Public Schools

- Teaches 10th grade civics as Perspectives on Race.
- Approach every school year with this in mind:
 - Make sure students know what to expect. As an adult, there's nothing worse than walking into a new situation and not knowing what to expect. Teenagers are the same way. Starts off from Day 1 with very, very clear expectations. Clear but kind. Try not to be too rigid, but clear.
 - I tell them about me. If they know who I am, they feel comfortable sharing who they are. I make it clear that I want to know who they are.
 - Starts students off by doing an identity wheel. **Attached**. Amanda's notes on the attached: These are generic examples that I use and I adapt it to each class. Some classes I am very specific about the direction they should be going in building their wheels, other classes I don't give them any direction other than "Tell me who you are", they run with it and know exactly what they want to show. And it truly is not based on the students levels or knowledge, its more about their life experiences with identity that drive how much direction they need and want. (Also – I make a new identity wheel every year along side the kids because every year I am inspired to create mine in a different way!)

Jo Ann added: A myth of RP is that it's chaos – it's actually the opposite. Make sure your expectations are clear and high.

Yenny Toone, Director of Early Care and Education, Family Centers

- See Yenny's slide **attached**.

- An important question is about how to engage with parents, since parents are not allowed into the building due to COVID-19.
- Whole ECE team was trained in RP virtually this spring.
- First, their team made a mantra: You are safe, you are important, you are loved.
- After RP training, we tasked ourselves with ensuring that children learned acceptance of all people. Started assessing within their programs how that looked.
 - Looked at lesson plans, how often are we doing diversity lessons within our curriculum?
 - What activities and materials do we use? Do we have enough of these materials?
 - Was it really woven into the fabric of what we do?
- It really matters to have a large quantity of these things: Diversity in word walls and books, multicultural dolls, toys, puzzles, games, mirrors, puppets, crayons and markers, matching memory games, and toy food.

Charmaine Tourse, Principal, Dolan Middle School, Stamford Public Schools

- Slides **attached**.
- Self-care is important. Adults need to stay in touch with self, with what you're thinking and feeling. Recognize that everyone has layers of struggling personally and professionally; all that is going on with COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, loved ones getting sick, knowing others who have lost loved ones, watching other people struggle. This isn't doom and gloom, this is a reality check. Stay as connected as possible with staff and families.
- Called a staff meeting right when George Floyd was murdered. Ended up launching a voluntary weekly meeting on race and trauma. With COVID-19 and racial trauma, they know "If we don't deal with it, it will deal with us." (See slide.) Three guiding questions:
 - What can I do differently to help every one of my students know that they matter?
 - How can we begin to address our own implicit biases, be ok to not be ok, and help each other become better human beings?
 - How can we as a collective group, help our school demonstrate, without question, that racism has no place at _____, in any way, shape or even the quietest form?
- Don't miss the miracle here. We get an opportunity to reinvent, recreate ourselves, and restore.
- We can never go back: Find the pieces that we've learned through this experience that have made us better and move forward with them. Capturing new ways of supporting one another, acknowledging people for who they are, refusing colorblindness, refusing to return to former discipline practices, we can now use online for anything. Don't go "back" to school, go "forward" to school.
- Now doing a book talk with staff on *The Body Keeps the Score*, will next be reading *White Fragility*.

Ryan Brown, 7th and 8th Grade Math Teacher, Read School, Bridgeport Public Schools

- Many math and science teachers think it's not their responsibility to go deep on SEL, because the content isn't there for it. But during the pandemic, I saw that:
 - COVID showed us the inequity and made the inequity deeper. We now have a chance to show students the problems in their community and give them opportunity to go deeper. For example, showing students district budget disparities, or racial disparities,

and empowering them to take action. Let the students get in the drivers seat, as educators, we facilitate that, and get them in front of the people who can make changes.

- COVID is a great opportunity to study exponential growth, epidemiology. And then you can bring those things back to the communities they live in. Show how certain cities are hit the hardest.

Paula provided a website with ideas for infusing SEL in math curriculum:

insidemathematics.org/common-core-resources/mathematical-practice-standards/social-and-emotional-mathematics-learning

Rebecca Wilson, Coordinator for College and Career Readiness/School Counselor Services, K-12, Stamford Public Schools

- Ask: “How do we focus on the adults so the adults can be in the best condition possible to serve the kids?” Have to think about how we are keeping ourselves healthy so we can better serve students.
- Ask: “How are we helping students develop their social awareness? And those who are aware, how do we help them channel that energy into change, helping one another, having a voice, and developing relationships?”
- With COVID-19, we have a sort of sterile environment. Touch is really important. Now, we can’t do that. That creates a sterile-ness about our interactions and relationships. And now we have to get creative about how we overcome that.
- We have to be aware of our actions, biases, and feelings, and how those are impacting our students.
- Important to keep equity in the forefront of our minds with counseling services. Includes consultation and collaboration with community members.

In response to the idea of needing to overcome the “sterile” environment, Joe Benanati recommended listening and energy activities. Energy activities: Begin by bring awareness to their own energy, then you bring their attention to your energy, and then you show how those two energies can entrain with each other. This is a great exercise for co-regulation and mindfulness. Listening: Kids sit ear to ear, facing opposite directors, so they can’t see each other’s faces. For one full minute, one partner talks and the other listens and cannot interrupt.

Conversation notes

- How do we make kids feel comfortable in physically different schools so that they can focus on learning? Carve out that safe space from the very beginning, letting them know that our priority is each other. We will get to the curriculum, it’s ok to feel whatever you are feeling in this moment.
- Ensure that adults in the building are united and on the same page.

- Ensure that adults are being authentic. Be vulnerable, share your own feelings (without raising the level of anxiety for students). See Covey's circle of concern and influence (referenced above).
- Remember Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which begins with safety. The foundation has to be there before anything else can happen.
- All of this takes practice! Practice with each other. Be relentless with the message that it's ok to practice.
- On leading conversations around race:
 - Charmaine starts with "does the messenger matter? Can you just see me as someone who's concerned?" Was blown away by how honest people were in the initial conversation. But it was scary at first! Thinking about doing a book talk for students on the Hate U Give. Doing a book talk for adults on White Fragility. (referenced at top.)
 - At ASPIRE, we do small groups with students. For the students right now, the racial tension is more traumatic than COVID-19, and it's what they want to talk about most. We allow students to share their experiences, let them talk about feelings, what they might do to spark change. Adults share their feelings too. Sometimes we'll read a news article and talk about that.
 - In Bridgeport, use Invitation to Brave Spaces (referenced at top). All of the adults did a circle around Invitation to Brave Spaces, and then went through how the faculty can use it with students.
 - Jo Ann pointed out that when a circle becomes safe by talking about things that aren't charged (solving math problems, talking about a character in a book, your favorite foods), you can then talk about almost anything and people open up.
 - With COVID-19, we start meetings by asking "How are you? Is everyone's family safe and healthy?" But we didn't do the same when George Floyd was murdered. It's important to ask and talk about it, otherwise we perpetuate invisibility. And when people are invisible it says "you don't matter."
 - Be mindful that all students are experiencing the unrest. Even non-POC kids may be upset and worried about what they are seeing. None of our students have lived through something like this, and it's our role to help students, staff, and families navigate it. Our entire community is experiencing this together.
 - Restorative work and civil rights work are journeys. This moment is happening because of the foundations built by generations before us. Understanding history is important, understanding that race is a social construct.