

Press Clippings 06/18/20

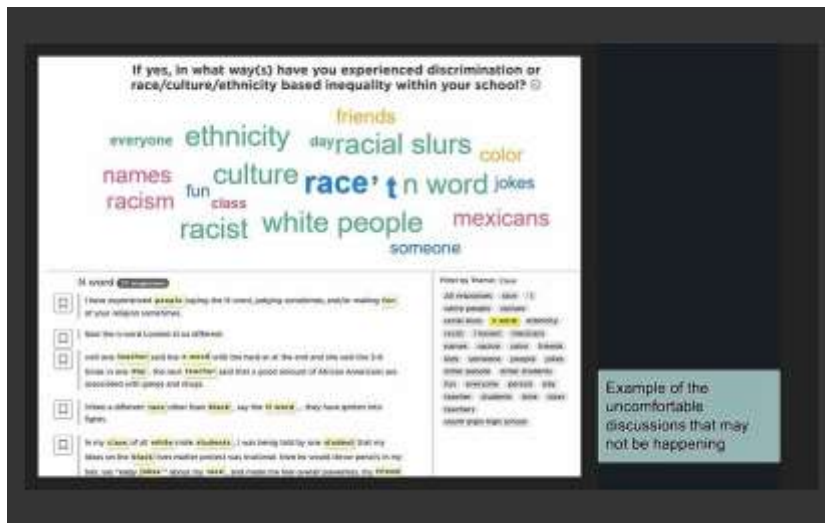
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U-46 talks about bias training and minority hiring

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



Elgin Unit District U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders says the district needs to hire more minority teachers and staff to better reflect the diversity of its student population.



Out of more than 38,000 Elgin Area School District U-46 students, only 5,507 responded to a student survey on equity and inclusion. Students shared their experiences with discrimination based on their race, culture or ethnicity.

Elgin Area School District U-46 leaders this week outlined ways to improve school climate and culture for all students, especially those who feel marginalized and need additional support.

The school board on Monday adopted a call to action for equity “to address the persistent policies, practices, and structures that continue to marginalize students, staff, and community members of color.”

As first steps, Superintendent Tony Sanders recommended the district provide implicit racial bias training for all employees, allocate funds to recruit and retain employees reflecting the diversity of students, and provide more resources for black male students, who are more likely than other students to be referred to special education services.

“We are a values-driven organization, but sometimes I don’t know that we are explicit in the resources we’ve identified to really address the areas of need across our school system,” Sanders said. “We need everybody working to support us in this important work, otherwise it’s just not going to happen.”

Officials also shared the results of a student survey on equity and inclusion — conducted in May at the height of the coronavirus pandemic — in which fourth- through 12th-graders rated schools on questions about their experiences.

Out of more than 38,000 students districtwide only 5,507 responded to the survey. Of those, 76% rated the district favorably on questions about diversity and inclusion and its annual Student Summit, 53% responded favorably to questions about feeling a sense of belonging, while only 36% responded favorably to questions about cultural awareness and action.

“We knew (participation) would have been much higher had we been in school buildings,” said Brian Lindholm, U-46 coordinator of strategic initiatives. “Our responses weren’t entirely representative of our student body.”

Hispanic students comprise 54.9% of the population in U-46. The remaining racial breakdown is 26% white, 8.3% Asian, 6.3% black, 3.4% two or more races, and less than 1% American Indian.

What stood out from the survey was students with a lower than 90% attendance rate and black male students were half as likely to complete the survey as those participating in gifted programs. Black male students also gave their schools lower ratings in nearly every area, Lindholm said.

English learners also rated the district poorly on diversity and inclusion.

Nearly half the students responded they were confident they could have honest conversations with their peers about race, but only 13% actually engaged in such conversations.