

## **Diversity Committee Meeting Summary**

**October 19, 2016**

On Wednesday, October 19, 2016 the Tredyffrin/Easttown Diversity Committee had their first meeting of the 2016-2017 school year. The guiding question of the evening was “How does T/E foster a culture of Acceptance and Respect for students of diverse Beliefs, Backgrounds and Perspectives?”

The first presentation was given by Conestoga’s Multi Cultural Club. They shared information about the Local Places of Worship Tour they took last spring. The purpose of the tour was to learn about different religions and their origins, and compare differences and similarities among them. Members of Multi Cultural Club visited 5 different worship centers of different faiths: Saint Isaac Jogues Catholic Church, the Islamic Society of Greater Valley Forge, the Chabad Jewish Center, the Baptist Church in Great Valley, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Each one opened its doors to the students and provided them with information about its history and allowed the students to ask as many questions they had about the religion and the people who worship there. During the tour the students also learned about how the ancestors of worship centers have struggled over the years to ensure their place of worship remains an important and active part of this community. Through this experience students not only developed a better understanding of other religions but also of their peers. One student summed up the experience with these words, “It was great that we had such an opportunity to learn about and experience so many different cultures and religions and it was a perfect field trip for us since we belong to Multi Cultural Club.”

The second presentation was provided by students of Conestoga’s newly formed South Asian Club. This club is just 2 years old and the students who presented shared the goal of their club to spread South Asian culture to the student body and to teach about the differences between Asian and South Asian people and culture. The students shared that in South Asia there are thousands of cultures, thousands of languages, and thousands of religions. In the United States there are 4,000,000 South Asian people. There are 8 South Asian countries including India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Shri Lanka and many others. Students shared the difficulty of completing forms that request their racial or ethnic identity. They also shared how they celebrate their Culture Day at Conestoga and how they are able to educate

students about the South Asian culture through traditional Indian clothing, art and dance.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Club of Conestoga presented their goals for the year, especially their “No Place For Hate” Initiative at Conestoga this year. Students also had the committee participate in an activity entitled, “Here I Stand” where participants were asked a series of questions about their beliefs on some difficult issues. This led to a very important and in-depth conversation about our experiences and personal beliefs regarding race and other topics.

The final presentation was on the Elementary Schools’ Holiday curriculum. Dr. Sterenczak shared that the goal of the curriculum is to teach about the religious and ethnic holidays through the use of appropriate literature. There are ten holidays taught in Kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade including Holidays such as Diwali, Hanukkah, Ramadan, Christmas, Lunar New Year, and Kwanza to name a few. Teachers read the selected book or story and then utilize the same three questions as a guided activity following the reading of the book. No other activity may be used for any of these ten holidays. The goal is that we will be teaching **about** the ten holidays in a sensitive, consistent, and informative manner. After the presentations, students on the committee shared how they still remember the lessons and whenever we have a day off they are cognizant of what certain cultures do on those specific days.

As you can see this was a very lively and informative committee meeting. Many members of the committee and community participated in the discussions and provided suggestions and ideas for future work.

Our next committee meeting will be held on Wednesday evening November 16<sup>th</sup> at TE Middle School. This meeting will consist of another experience where we hope to learn more about ourselves and our personal journey toward cultural proficiency.