

Diversity Committee Summary

October 25, 2017

On Wednesday, October 25, 2017, the Diversity Committee met to discuss how T/E fosters an environment of acceptance and success for English Learners new to our District and community.

The meeting began with Dr. Oscar Torres welcoming new student members to the Diversity Committee. Mrs. Jeanne Braun, Community and Volunteer Services Coordinator, shared information about the international student exchange program, which has a rich history at Conestoga. This year, five students are being hosted by Conestoga families. The students are visiting from Brazil, Germany, France, Chile and Austria. The AFS (American Field Service) students from Germany and Chile shared their experiences as exchange students at Conestoga. The students shared their challenges as well as the successes they are experiencing while living with a host family within our community. We also heard from some families who have been hosting the students and they shared how the students have enriched their own family experiences.

Dr. Torres then provided information regarding the District's English as a Second Language (ESL) Program, which currently serves 219 students from 25 different countries. ESL Specialists, Mrs. Julia Sponseller from Hillside Elementary School, Mrs. Ana White from Valley Forge Middle School, and Mrs. Kathryn Burling from Conestoga High School, along with some of their students, shared examples of work the students are accomplishing in the ESL classrooms. Students from each school also gave a presentation to the Committee about their journey to the U.S. and shared the similarities and differences between their schools here and the schools in their native countries. The students captivated the Committee members with their passion for learning the English language and their enthusiasm for sharing information about their schools in their native countries.

It was evident that TESD's English learners have a safe and supportive environment in the ESL classroom as they acquire new English language skills. During the school day, students have had opportunities to share their experiences with their own classmates and with students at other schools. For example, English Learners visited elementary classrooms to share their experiences about coming to the U.S. when the younger students learned about immigration. Miss Aurora Zenunlari, a Conestoga graduate and former English Learner who serves on the Committee as a community representative, shared the impact the ESL program and the TESD teachers have had on her.

We are looking forward to our next meeting on January 17th where we will hear more from our students and staff.