



Findings from the Big Conversation VII:

A Community Conversation on Dismantling Racism: Progress and Challenges in Our Schools

January 27, 2019

An Executive Summary

The Big Conversation series was originated by Middleham and St. Peter's Parish in Lusby to provide opportunities for communitywide civil conversation on topics of concern. This seventh annual Big Conversation, with support from the 12 "Partners in Dismantling Racism in Southern Maryland", was held at Patuxent H.S. on January 27 and drew over 220 participants. The topic was on dismantling racism in our community with a focus on our schools. It began with a panel of local leaders and students sharing their experiences in addressing racism in Southern Maryland school systems. Then in small groups, led by trained facilitators, attendees listened deeply to each other as they shared experiences and stories. How often do we have an opportunity for Blacks and Whites to talk with each other and to share and understand our community and life experiences? The groups considered how we might further dismantle racism in our schools, what needs to be done, and what we, as individuals and a community, can do. The following summarizes the recommendations of the panelists, the small groups, and the attendees.

Listening and Being in Conversation

Racism still exists across our schools. There is a critical need to increase opportunities to listen deeply to each other through conversations like this. It needs to happen at multiple levels: among students, between students, teachers, and administrators, and with parents and the community. It is through listening to each other that we can develop a fuller appreciation and understanding of where and how racism exists and how to address it. We need to be better at listening to students. We need to reach people and parents that may not be open-minded who should be in the conversation. We need to have the courage to address racism when we see it – not be silent. Examples include developing a "DARE" type program to address racism and a pamphlet on how to address racism when encountered.

Teacher Training and Development

When teachers encounter racially sensitive situations or have to present culturally sensitive curricula, they need to be given supports to help them navigate the topics with their students. Teachers need continuing training in equity and implicit bias, the culture and how to deal with conflict. We need to help build up a "teacher toolbox" for addressing implicit bias, hearing student experiences, and continuing to address racism / not one-and-done. Teachers should have ongoing support systems available to them.

Teacher Hiring and Retention / Community Support for Teachers

The racial makeup of teachers in our schools should reflect the student population, and that is not the case by a significant margin. There need to be new and more effective strategies for minority recruitment.

We need to value all teachers, including new minority teachers, through a variety of support systems, as is done for military families. Having affordable housing available is a major challenge. As noted in the Kirwan Report, improved local initiatives are needed that encourage current high school students to become teachers.

A More Diverse Curriculum / Accurate and Complete History

White people's perception of people of color is developed from home environment and school curricula. Too often that curricula present an unbalanced, Eurocentric, inaccurate, or incomplete representation of people of color. School curricula should be reviewed and updated to reflect a balanced and complete

representation. We understand that Calvert County is doing an audit of the curriculum that will take three years. Questions were asked about what is being audited, why three years, and the degree of community involvement. Our own local histories are incomplete as well. A better understanding of current race relations begins with our own local history and culture. We should encourage the work of our local library, historical society, churches and county officials to complete the development of an updated local history that can inform both the students, teachers and all residents. Local history and culture should be included in all grades K-12.

Political Action and Support / Leadership

Equity in the schools must be a priority, not an option, both in terms of funding and instruction. Superintendents of schools were represented both on the panel and in the conversations, as were members of the boards of education. County commissioners were not in attendance. All public officials for the schools and counties should be actively involved in conversations and follow up actions around dismantling racism. The Kirwan Commission proposals to the legislature recommend adequate resources to ensure that equitable education should be supported. Make dismantling racism a focus or goal for all aspects of the county – commissioners, business, government, health and medical care, schools, churches, media, NGO’s, watermen, military, library, parks and recreation, etc. – you live here, you have a role to play.

Equity in Administrative Systems

Information was presented on state requirements for each local school system to develop an equity policy – the Maryland Educational Equity Initiative. What is needed is to share those policies and to have systems for accountability and follow up. Too often we set policies and begin initiatives and then they are forgotten or not enforced.

Systems are needed to encourage better access and communication regarding equity concerns – that teachers are relatable, open, and available to students of color, that there are mentors available, and parents know where to go for help – perhaps through an ombudsman.

There is a concern regarding the equitable distribution of resources. We need to analyze data showing how resources are distributed across counties and within schools in terms of equitably responding to race. Disproportionate disciplinary action is a concern and should be addressed. Too often persons of color, especially males in our schools, are singled out for discipline in greater numbers than their percentage in the population. Suggested responses included a need for restorative justice initiatives including community conferencing programs and encouraging more people to serve as role models and mentors.

Further information is available through the following:

Check out our clearinghouse at www.dismantleracism.org for more readings and resources.

The “Building Bridges” booklet was distributed at the event on January 27. It includes a listing of contact information for organizations involved in dismantling racism in Southern Maryland and is on the clearinghouse. It is a great resource if you want to get involved.

Contact us by email – bigconmsp@gmail.com



Brought to you by Middleham and St. Peter’s Parish with **The Big Conversation Partnership for Dismantling Racism in Southern Maryland** including: All Saints Episcopal Church – Sunderland, Calvert County Public Schools, Calvert Library, Calvert NAACP, Community Mediation Centers of Calvert and St. Mary’s Counties, Concerned Black Women of Calvert Co, Emmanuel SDA Church – St. Leonard, Harriet Elizabeth Brown Scholars, Patuxent Friends (Quaker Meeting), St. Mary’s NAACP