

Addendum to *Letter to North Allegheny on Anti-Racism*

Policy details, research, and resources collated by
NA for Change Task Force

This document grew out of the *Letter to North Allegheny on Anti-Racism* [petition](#). The petition outlines demands that are supported by over 1700 members of the North Allegheny community. As an organization of students committed to making North Allegheny more inclusive, we have provided research, policy suggestions, and extensions for each of the demands listed in the petition. We hope North Allegheny School District leadership will utilize this document to guide tangible policy and curricular changes to guarantee an inclusive school environment, free from discrimination toward marginalized communities.

Throughout this document, we use the term BIPOC, which stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. The term is used to build solidarity across these groups while acknowledging the unique relationship to whiteness that Indigenous and Black people have.¹

¹ [The BIPOC Project](#). (n.d.).

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Background

In a recent statement following the murder of George Floyd, North Allegheny school district has announced: “[our] hope is that the North Allegheny community can be a part of a larger movement that is working to promote² positive, systemic change in our changing world.”

The catastrophic effects of racism do not begin and end with the loss of life. Your students, past, present, and future, will, unfortunately, likely grow up in a world where their opportunities to learn in a quality environment³, attend college⁴, buy a home⁵, obtain ideal employment⁶, vote⁷, eat fresh food⁸, have healthy interactions with law enforcement⁹, and more generally live a happy life will depend upon the color of their skin. While the horrific nature of ongoing deaths due to police brutality have pushed systemic racism to the forefront of our national consciousness, we are painfully aware that the practice predates our country itself¹⁰. Our country was founded on the evils of slavery and was only able to flourish through the subjugation of Black Americans¹¹. It was not even until 1881, that Pennsylvania had mandated the desegregation of schools in congruence with the Civil Rights Act of 1866; however, this amendment to equal protections under the law had been actively circumvented by many local governments in order to maintain separation based on color until the 1970s¹². It is important to understand that this end to segregation was just 50 years ago and the impact of inequality still harms people of color, not just in our community but across the nation. To combat widespread and institutional discrimination, we need comprehensive, systemic change in all aspects of our society, beginning in our schools. Our goal is to build a school environment that equips the students of North Allegheny with the knowledge and experiences to bring about even greater and more sweeping systemic change to society.

We urge that the school district take a more productive stance on addressing social matters such as disparate treatment by adopting anti-racist policies. We have taken it upon ourselves to collaborate with over 70 past and current students to submit to the board members, a thoroughly researched policy addendum to supplement our petition that we had summarized at

² [Letter to North Allegheny on Anti-racism](#)

³ Darling-Hammond, L. (2016, July 28). [Unequal Opportunity: Race and Education](#).

⁴ N. (2019, February). [Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups](#).

⁵ [Figure 8. Quarterly Homeownership Rates by Race and Ethnicity of Householder for the United States: 1994–2019](#) (2020, March 10).

⁶ [Labor force characteristics by race and ethnicity, 2018 \(Rep. No. 1082\)](#). (2019, October). Retrieved June 24, 2020, from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics website

⁷ Johnson, T. R., & Feldman, M. (2020, June 12). [The New Voter Suppression](#).

⁸ Brooks, K. (2014, March 10). [Research shows food deserts more abundant in minority neighborhoods](#).

⁹ Weisburd, D.; Majmundar, M. K. (2018). [Racial Bias and Disparities in Proactive Policing](#). In *Proactive policing: Effects on crime and communities* (pp. 251-302). Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

¹⁰ Olusoga, D. (2015, September 08). [The roots of European racism lie in the slave trade, colonialism – and Edward Long | David Olusoga](#).

¹¹ Lockhart, P. (2019, August 16). [How slavery became America's first big business](#).

¹² O'Malley, M. J., III (Ed.). (2010). [Desegregation of Pennsylvania Schools](#). *Pennsylvania Heritage Magazine*, XXXVI(2).

last week’s meeting. Over 1,700 students, alumni, parents, and community members have signed this petition in support of our efforts. Many students in minority communities within our schools have been promised changes for over two decades but have not seen followthrough. The large discrepancy evident between the board’s promises and their *tangible actions* grossly denies the basic rights of its students as guaranteed in the School Board’s own policies. As stated in section 200 - pupils code 235 of the School Board’s policies, paragraph A, states that “...**no student shall be deprived of equal treatment and equal access to the educational program.**”¹³ We want to emphasize that to build an inclusive community and educate students on ways to combat hatred—in the words of American academic and activist Angela Davis—“**it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist.**”¹⁴

In order for the North Allegheny to commit to its “**proud history of focusing on diversity and inclusion,**”¹⁵ we believe that the board *ought* to take into account the voices of the very pupils and tax-paying families it serves. If the board is unable to uphold the rights of the people that it is put in place to serve, then they cannot be seen as a legitimate governing body. The district is not properly addressing structural inequalities and implicit biases, but this can be corrected in an inexpensive and easy manner by addressing the following topics:

¹³ North Allegheny School Board Policies: “Student Rights and Responsibilities”

¹⁴ Being Antiracist. (2020, May 31).

¹⁵ North Allegheny 2019 Diversity Report

Anti-Racist School Environment

Staff and Administration Diversity

Goal: Address the lack of diversity in North Allegheny’s staff and administration across all levels, particularly as it applies to the hiring process for the new Superintendent.

Rationale:

- Students tend to learn better when teachers look like them, especially students of color.¹⁶
- Teachers of color have more positive perceptions of students of color, and this does not come at the cost of their perceptions of white students.¹⁷
- White students can also benefit from teachers of color, helping them question assumptions about race, class, privilege, and stereotypes; in fact, a 2009 meta study found that cross-race contact lead to significant reductions in racial bias.¹⁸
- Diverse school administrators benefit students and teachers of color, as they can change perceptions of what types of people can be in a position of power.¹⁹
- Diverse school administrators can also serve as role models for students, which has been tied with student success.²⁰
- North Allegheny students, alumni, and parents have called for more diverse teaching staff even before this petition.²¹
- It is in our best interest to prepare students for the much more diverse world that exists outside of Pittsburgh/North Allegheny.²²
 - The Pennsylvania Department of Education cites civic engagement and student interpersonal skills as federal standards for Social Studies curricula.²³
- The new “Superintendent” is to be a public servant who serves as a student advocate, not an individual who will best further the personal interests of the board members. The School Superintendents Association, AASA, states that “a closed-door process can lead to harmful gossip and misinformation”.²⁴

¹⁶ Gershenson, S., Hart, C. M., Hyman, J., Lindsay, C., & Papageorge, N. (2017). The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers. *IZA Institute of Economics*. doi:10.3386/w25254

¹⁷ Bond and others, “The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education.”

¹⁸ Elizabeth Levy Paluck and Donald P. Green, “Prejudice Reduction: What Works? A Review and Assessment of Research and Practice,” *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60 (2009): 339–67.

¹⁹ Carlson, Jim. “Diverse school-district administration beneficial to students, research shows,” *Penn State College of Education* (August 2016.)

²⁰ Snelling, J. (2019, March 22). [Being the change we seek: How diverse voices strengthen schools.](#)

²¹ [North Allegheny board hears stories of middle school bullying, lack of minority inclusion.](#) (2018, May 29)

²² [The Importance of Diversity in the Classroom.](#) (2019, January 17).

²³ [Social Studies.](#) (n.d.).

²⁴ [Superintendent Searches Public or Confidential?](#) (n.d.)

- In the stakeholder report conducted by McPherson & Jacobson, LLC, respondents indicated lack of different racial and cultural perspectives within the district as a crucial consideration.²⁵
- In the same report, parties mentioned that there is a stark lack of diversity and fairness within hiring processes.
 - *“the diversity in the district is not reflected in the school board or the community councils,” [pg. 56]*²⁴
 - *“The district’s HR practices have be[en] laden with nepotism for decades” [pg. 58]*²⁴
 - *“The district struggles with diversity staff and differential education. All students are not treated equal due to the lack of understanding of cultural differences” [pg. 58]*²⁴

Actionables:

- **Include** the Diversity Recruiter as an active and equal participant on the hiring committee, increasing transparency during these processes.
- **Provide** a transparent hiring process for the new Superintendent.
 - Actively recruit a diverse applicant pool and shortlist candidates who prioritize a commitment to anti-racism by using proven methods utilized at Fortune 500 companies²⁶ and cited within Harvard’s Guide to Diversity Recruitment²⁷.
 - Ensure there is representation on the hiring committee of students and faculty from economically, racially, gender-wise diverse backgrounds and publish the list of members on the North Allegheny website.
- **Undergo** a third-party review of hiring practices to identify harmful patterns.
 - McPherson & Jacobson, LLC, could be utilized to conduct this review as well.
- **Actively recruit** diverse staff at all levels and positions.
 - *Networking* at events such as the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) Conference, the State of Black Learning Conference, and the Southwest Pennsylvania Diversity Practitioners Coalition.
 - *Marketing* positions through online venues and diversity career recruiters such as www.military.com, the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, PA Career Link, Vibrant Pittsburgh, Diversity Working, and IM Diversity.
 - *Campus recruiting* using flyers, on-site recruitment, and job fairs at both local universities as well as Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
 - *Utilize other diversity-oriented job fairs* such as the Pittsburgh Education Recruitment Consortium (PERC) Job Fair.
 - *Improving Hiring Flexibilities:*
 - Utilize the Guest Substitute Teaching Program that has brought in candidates to the district that may have not otherwise approached North Allegheny. The program allows candidates to be substitute teachers with an emergency permit from the PA Department of Education.
 - *Increase social media presence* to publicize open positions.

²⁵ [North Allegheny Stakeholders Input Report](#)

²⁶ Davis, K. (2018, February 26). [Top Companies Are Missing Talent From Historically Black Colleges.](#)

²⁷ [Recruiting for Diversity](#) - Harvard University. (n.d.)

- **Utilize** Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to give people a chance to feel supported and have their voices heard within our community.
- **Publish** statistics on the demographics of applicants and those consequently interviewed and hired, in addition to diversity statistics of current faculty members.

Diversity Training

Goal: Require regular diversity training for all North Allegheny staff and board members.

Rationale:

- Students at NA have expressed that they have been let down by staff regarding diversity issues.²⁸
- Diversity is increasing:
 - As a general trend across schools²⁹
 - At NA:
 - 2015: 82.4% white³⁰
 - 2018: 77.79% white³¹
- Not all people who share a culture are the same.³²
- Teachers model behavior for students.
- Training would:
 - Allow students to feel more supported.
 - Educator Lisa Delpit: the best way for a teacher to teach a child who is different from them is by going to others who know the culture of that child.³³
 - Improved student outcomes seen when teachers rely less on generalizations and prejudices.³⁴
 - Help teachers support students developing their identity.
 - Provide teachers with guidance on how to address matters of discrimination in their classroom.
 - Teachers begin to consider how their actions and thoughts are influenced by culture and power.³⁵
 - Talking with experienced teachers and other trained professionals can help teachers identify “blind spots and misperceptions” as well as learn new strategies for dealing with complex topics.³⁴
 - Help teacher support each other learn and improve in how they address issues of diversity.³⁴

²⁸ Testimonials from Current and Former Students of Color

²⁹ Diaz, Carlos F. *Multicultural Education for the 21 st Century*. Longman, New York, 2001.

³⁰ Ed.gov published survey data from North Allegheny, 2015

³¹ NA 2019 Annual Report: Measuring Success

³² Gonzalez-Mena, Janet. *Diversity in Early Care and Education*. p. 5. McGraw Hill, Boston, 2008 (5).

³³ *qtd in* Ramsey, Patricia G. *Teaching and Learning in a Diverse World*. p. 104. Teachers College Press, New York, 1998 (2).

³⁴ Espinosa, Linda. Getting it Right for Young Children from Diverse Backgrounds. p. 21. Learning Solutions, New York, 2010.

³⁵ *Kincheloe qtd in* Ramsey, Patricia G. *Teaching and Learning in a Diverse World*. p. 99. Teachers College Press, New York, 1998 (2).

Actionables:

- **Require** teachers, administrators, and board members (hereafter relevant parties) to partake in a diversity training that:
 - *Discusses* social identities and how they are formed (sample [resource](#)).³⁶
 - These identities should include, but are not limited to, race, gender, sexuality, ability, language, national origin, ethnicity, beliefs
 - *Defines* how privilege and oppression manifest (sample [resource](#)).³⁷
 - *Prepares* relevant parties to have conversations about race (sample [resource](#)).³⁸
 - *Trains* relevant parties on how to respond to discrimination or harrassment when it is observed in the classroom or in other areas of school property (sample [resource](#)).³⁹
 - *Demonstrates* how to report an act of discrimination or harrassment or what to do when a student reports an act of discrimination or harrassment to them (see [Disciplinary Policy](#)).³⁶
 - *Provides* tangible ways to support students with regard to identity (sample [resource](#)).⁴⁰
 - *Ensures* that teachers reflect on their own biases (both implicit and explicit) and how that may impact their actions, particularly regarding student discipline (sample [resource](#)).⁴¹
 - *Illustrates* how to apologize for insensitive comments or other identity-based discrimination and harassment (sample [resource](#)).⁴²
 - *Lasts* 90 hours.
 - May be completed through a continuing professional education, so long as that course meets the requirements listed above and is worth at least 3.0 credits of collegiate study or 3.0 credits of PDE-approved continuing professional education courses.
- **Update** diversity material every five years to stay up to date with relevant research and terminology:
 - *Revising* the Teacher Handbook section entitled: “Guidelines in Dealing with Controversial Issues and Materials”.
 - Currently, this section makes no mention of race, gender identity, or sexual orientation as “audience background” characteristics to consider when discussing controversial topics.
 - This section also explicitly says that when students react negatively it is because they are “being overly sensitive”.
 - *Revising all other relevant material.*

³⁶ Harro, B. (n.d.). [The Cycle of Socialization](#).

³⁷ McIntosh, P. (1990). [White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#).

³⁸ Nadworny, E. (2015, April 24). [Uncomfortable Conversations: Talking About Race In The Classroom](#).

³⁹ Willoughby, B. (2018). [Speak Up At School](#).

⁴⁰ Becki Cohn-Vargas and Dorothy M. Steele. (2015, October 21). [Creating an Identity-Safe Classroom](#).

⁴¹ Gregory, A., Hafen, C. A., Ruzek, E., Mikami, A. Y., Allen, J. P., & Pianta, R. C. (2016). [Closing the Racial Discipline Gap in Classrooms by Changing Teacher Practice](#). *School Psychology Review*, 45(2), 171-191. doi:10.17105/spr45-2.171-191

⁴² [Acknowledge your mistakes and apologize](#) - Eberly Center - Carnegie Mellon University. (n.d.).

- **Encourage** the Diversity Recruiter and, by extension, the Diversity Committee to provide input in professional development and diversity training selection processes.
- **Hold** teachers accountable to this material by:
 - *Passing* a test covering the material herein described every year AND
 - *Undergoing* diversity training within all aspects of Professional Development to provide more extensive and applicable ways to be more inclusive in everyday teaching routines.
- **Ensure** that teachers who are found to have discriminated or harassed a student based on social-identities apologize to all who witnessed the event (based on the principles established in training) and re-complete the diversity training before teaching again.

Diversity Committee

Goal 1: Reformulate the Diversity Committee as a governing body with greater autonomy, increased power, and funding.

Rationale:

- *Diversity Best Practices* advocates for Diversity and Inclusion Committees' power to implement the ideas developed as a way to ensure a results-oriented strategy is followed.⁴³
- As the issue of diversity and inclusion is an ever-evolving practice, any substantial and results-oriented Diversity and Inclusion committee should have the respect, resource, and support available to continuously recommend and implement best practices for both students and teachers.⁴⁴
- Students have anecdotally expressed concern with the results of efforts currently undertaken by the Diversity Committee, including:
 - The Celebration of Us:
 - “Although the event is fun, it oftentimes feels more like a showcase than an actual support for the community; performing is fun, but a lack of attendance and of uncomfortable conversations leaves students feeling like a surface-level event is underway.” -10th Grade NA student
 - Annual Diversity Expression Contest:
 - “I remember participating in the annual Diversity Committee contest every year, eagerly drawing an earth each year with different symbols spaced throughout the piece. Looking back as an adult, I don't see a truly substantial effect the contest had on me. It was nothing more than a checkbox to me, and I feel as though it is treated as such by some members of the North Allegheny School District.” -NA Alum, Class of 2016
- Creating a more symbiotic relationship between the Diversity Committee and upper administration including the North Allegheny School Board, would allow for more honest and objective feedback, and thus more tangible results.
 - A 2019 study by Boston Consulting Group explains that *Fortune 500* company CEOs showed a mostly homogeneous demographic, with only 24 being women, 3 being Black, and only 3 gay CEOs. When employees are asked if they see obstacles to diversity and inclusion in their company, more diverse employees are more inclined to say yes, while white, heterosexual males are more likely to conclude that the day-to-day experience is free from bias.⁴⁵
 - Although the administration at North Allegheny has become slightly more representative of the community, especially with multiple women holding influential administrative positions, the issue of culture and race is still seen as an

⁴³ DBP RESEARCH REQUEST - [Diversity Best Practices](#). (n.d.).

⁴⁴ Diversity Best Practices [Homepage](#). (n.d.).

⁴⁵ [Fixing the Flawed Approach to Diversity](#). (n.d.).

issue in the district; therefore, allowing a dedicated group of committee members that includes students, BIPOC, and community members dedicated to uplifting the concept of anti racism and equity.

Actionables:

- **Hire** a diversity consultant, which would report equally to the upper administration and Diversity Committee, that conducts a thorough assessment of the school district and provides objective recommendations on immediate areas of improvement.
- **Ensure** the Diversity Committee holds regular open meetings where students and other community members can provide feedback, as well as executive meetings with a core membership.
- **Allow** the Committee to monitor hiring practices, coordinate anti-racism training, and ensure the prioritization of anti-racism within the North Allegheny community and the execution of the other goals listed in this document.
- **Increase** funding to the Committee to ensure that the body has the resources available to carry out their tasks.

Goal 2: Allow a part-time or full-time Diversity Consultant to sit on the Committee and professionally guide the work of the Committee in conjunction with the chair or better utilize the Diversity Liaison by expanding the position beyond the secondary level.

Rationale:

- The district heavily relies on the Diversity Committee to fulfill its five focal points of diversity.⁴⁶
- High-achieving Allegheny County public schools, outside of the Pittsburgh Area, show racial disparities in academic achievement for black students.⁴²
- A position similar that of Diversity Consultant has been used in other school districts within Allegheny County, showing remarkable progress in closing racial gaps within education.⁴⁷
- The Diversity Liaison was a key component in NA's recent attainment of ADL's No Place for Hate distinction.⁴⁸

Actionables:

- **Expand** the reach of the Diversity Liaison beyond the Senior High School so they may be able to help minority students across the district.
 - If the board is unable to hire a part-time Consultant, consider utilizing the Liaison position to direct these efforts.
- **Create** pan-district opportunities such as mentoring and tutoring programs that will benefit students of all ages and communities.
- **Consider** hiring a minority counselor, especially at the high school, considering there are no people of color employed as counselors within the district.

⁴⁶ North Allegheny Website: "[Diversity at NA](#)"

⁴⁷ Niederberger, M. (2019, August 15). [New data shows racial achievement gaps at more than half of Allegheny County school districts](#) - PublicSource: News for a better Pittsburgh.

⁴⁸ [North Allegheny designates five secondary schools as 'No Place for Hate'](#). (2020, June 19).

- Mr. Hambrick’s retirement left a gap in our ability to provide assistance to students of color and acknowledge their diverse perspectives.
- If not hiring a minority counselor, consider intensive diversity training for all counselors in the school district.
 - This would help to provide a safe space where students from marginalized groups can report harassment or speak about issues relating to discrimination that they may be uncomfortable to report to administration.

Goal 3: Increase student involvement and reduce high member turnover.

Rationale:

- The inconsistent student involvement and low faculty involvement has made it difficult for the Diversity Committee to follow through on the initiatives that they would like to implement.
- Designating student assemblies and activities dealing with race and culture, such as the 2019-2020 *No Place For Hate* assembly which took place at the Senior High School, as optional greatly diminishes their impact and demonstrates a lack of full-throated commitment to the issues of antiracism.
 - Many students were not able to attend the important assembly due to teachers assigning tests and subtly discouraging students from attending the event by imposing academic ultimatums.
 - This behavior is antithetical to the stated positions of the North Allegheny School District, which includes a “commitment [to] and support of the Diversity initiative.”⁴⁹

Actionables:

- **Increase** minority faculty involvement by encouraging them to sit on the committee as permanent members.
- **Include** an allotted member position for at least one student representative from clubs such as the Multicultural Student Union and Gender and Sexuality Alliance to advocate for marginalized voices and provide accurate and nuanced insight to problems within the student body.
 - Candidates would be interviewed by either a faculty or administration member before running within their respective organizations to ensure a commitment to antiracism and inclusion along with the key traits of responsibility and initiative are present in the candidate.
- **Create** a vetting process for prospective Diversity Committee core membership to increase member attendance and ensure an active executive membership is established.
- **Designate** a time for students to be involved in civic engagement, whether through homeroom or an activity period.
- **Require** that any assemblies focusing on diversity and inclusion mandate student attendance.

⁴⁹ Diversity at NA / Diversity at NASD. (n.d.). North Allegheny School District.

Student Affinity Groups

Goal: Encourage BIPOC and other minority-demographic students to form affinity groups to facilitate feeling of community.

Rationale:

- Students of color discuss their experiences with other students of color, from whom they receive support and understanding.⁵⁰
- Support for students of color in predominantly White communities is crucial to their success,⁵¹ especially because they may not fit in culturally.⁵²
- Affinity groups create a safe space for identity based discussion that:
 - Is particularly helpful for developing confidence in or understanding of identity⁵³
 - Can later impact school actions that make the environment more equitable⁵¹
 - Allows for cross cultural dialogue⁵⁴
 - Educates and empowers.⁵⁵
- Administrators may better understand issues that their students of color are facing from affinity groups and use this information to create a better school environment for all.⁵³
- Affinity groups center students who might otherwise be relegated to the margins; they may otherwise feel disregarded.⁵⁶
- Affinity groups help minority students feel less alone.⁵⁷
- Affinity groups can lead to improvements in self-esteem levels, peer networks, and racial identity development.⁵⁸
- Gains are seen at the primary level⁵⁶ and secondary level.⁵⁹
- Affinity groups are more successful when there is community support and engaged student attendance.⁶⁰

⁵⁰ Tatum, B. D. (2003). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* New York, NY: Basic Books.

⁵¹ Arnold, J. T. (2006). *Employee networks*. HR Magazine. 51(6), 145-152.

⁵² Delpit, L., & Dowdy, J. K. (2008). *The skin that we speak: Thoughts on language and culture in the classroom*. New York, NY: New Press.

⁵³ Bell, Monita A. (Summer 2015). *Making Space*. Teaching Tolerance.

⁵⁴ Batiste, G. (2006). *Understanding affinity: Benefits and challenges for an independent school community* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://slideplayer.com/slide/6183062/>

⁵⁵ Chun, Cindy P. (2016). *Best practices of affinity groups in independent schools*. (Doctoral Dissertation, Pepperdine University). Retrieved from ProQuest.

⁵⁶ Bell, Monita A. (Summer 2015). *Making Space*. Teaching Tolerance

⁵⁷ Parsons, J.; Ridley, K. (Winter 2012). *Identity, Affinity, Reality*. National Association of Independent Schools.

⁵⁸ Hartness, Amanda J.. (January 2012). *THE EFFECTS OF AFFINITY GROUPS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING* (Doctoral Dissertation, East Carolina University). Retrieved from the Scholarship.

⁵⁹ Stephens, Lee-Ann. (2017). *A Phenomenological Study of the Students Who Were Actively Engaged in the High Achievement Program at a Suburban High School*. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Minnesota). R

⁶⁰ Chun, Cindy P. (2016). *Best practices of affinity groups in independent schools*. (Doctoral Dissertation, Pepperdine University). Retrieved from ProQuest.

Actionables:

- **Install** a Multicultural Student Union (MSU) in each school in the school district that meets at least once a week during lunch, activity period, or other time specified by students.
 - If no students show up to the first MSU of the marking period, the school administrator may suspend the MSU for that nine weeks IF AND ONLY IF the school administrator has appropriately advertised the program (see “Actively advertise” below); otherwise, the administrator must actively advertise the program for a new start date.
 - If only one student shows up to the first MSU of the marking period, the administrator or other faculty designee of the student must meet with the student twice during the marking period in lieu of the MSU, provided that the school administrator appropriately advertised the program (see “Actively advertise” below); otherwise, the administrator must actively advertise the program for a new start date.
- **Establish** a faculty advisor for each school’s MSU who will be compensated as a club advisor following the NASD Teacher Handbook (“The Advisor will be compensated at a rate of \$25 per hour up to 20 hours per year for a maximum of \$500.”)
 - Students may petition the school administrator if they feel this faculty advisor is not doing an adequate job; the school administrator may opt to replace the faculty advisor if deemed necessary.
 - If a majority of MSU members support a motion of no confidence, the school administrator must replace the faculty advisor with MSU member input.
- **Actively advertise** the purpose and meeting dates of the MSU to all the students at least once per marking period; this should include paper/digital (e.g. Thursday envelope) and verbal (e.g. loudspeaker announcements) means.
- **Support** members of each school’s MSU connecting with each other by facilitating technology requests.
- **Connect** members of the NASH and NAI MSUs with the faculty advisor of the district’s elementary and middle school MSUs so that they may establish a mentorship program; this program should be driven by MSU members vision.
- **Invite** district MSU members from all schools to speak with the Diversity Liaison at least once a year.
- **Allow** each middle and high school MSU to elect one representative to sit on the Diversity Committee:
 - Election to take place during the first marking period
 - Term will last until the end of the year
 - These regulations would be incorporated in the constitutions of each respective club.
- **Host** a district wide parent affinity group twice a year (once in September, and once in February).
 - They will receive MSU meeting summaries from faculty advisors.
 - They will be able to elect one representative to sit on the Diversity Committee for a year term at the first meeting of the year.

- **Require** school administrators to meet with MSU leaders monthly.
- **Inform** incoming families and students of MSU on Diversity initiatives.

Disciplinary Policy

Goal 1: Establish a non-tolerance policy of harassment and other acts of discrimination, and implement a reporting system and objective disciplinary policy.

Rationale:

- Students often feel uncomfortable in reporting acts of discrimination:
 - “According to the Human Rights Campaign, almost half of LGBTQ workers believe that even if an antidiscrimination policy is in effect, it wouldn’t be enforced if their own supervisor is not supportive of the LGBTQ community. As a result, many employees in this group are reluctant to report issues.”⁶¹ Given the inexplicably controversial nature of the acknowledgement of systemic racism, this factoid can be logically extended to minority students, who have anecdotally expressed the same sentiment for years in peer-to-peer settings and through the Multicultural Student Union.⁶²
- Therefore, it is necessary to establish to a system that allows students to face layers of conflict resolution in an effort to educate, rehabilitate, and move on from an action of discrimination and harassment.
 - Students have shown initiative in taking leadership in their respective schools; by allowing students the chance to practice conflict resolution, we can create a safer space for students and a more positive school climate, one of the focuses of the school district.

Actionables:

- **Provide** a clear and anonymous pathway for students to report microaggressions and hate speech (defined by the United Nations [here](#))⁶³.
- **Revise** the Code of Conduct to clearly outline the disciplinary steps that will be taken to address discrimination and harassment.
- **Define** what constitutes discrimination and harassment in the Code of Conduct.
- **Utilize** a rehabilitative rather than punitive approach for minor transgressions to educate students and encourage them to learn from mistakes.
- **Encourage** *all* students, not just students of color, to use this pathway whenever they encounter microaggressions or hate speech in schools.
- **Solicit** feedback from students on how this policy can evolve and improve.
- **Revise** the Harassment Tracking Process and review them as they are received rather than on a biannual basis which has shown to be ineffective in the past.

⁶¹ [Fixing the Flawed Approach to Diversity](#). (n.d.).

⁶² A., Guterres. (2019, May). [United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#) [PDF]. United Nations Secretary-General.

⁶³ Na, S. (2016, February 03). [MU's Asian students reluctant to report episodes of discrimination, racism](#).

Goal 2: Examine and correct biases in disciplinary policies that often disproportionately target students of color.

Rationale:

- The United States Department of Education found that Black preschool students were three times more likely to be expelled than white preschool students⁶⁴
- Nationally, Black students have higher suspension, expulsion, and arrest rates than white students across school levels.⁶⁵ The rates are even higher when gender is considered, with girls receiving the highest rates of punishment.⁶⁶
- Nationally, “students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than students without disabilities.”⁶⁷
- Harsh disciplinary actions are ineffective and counterproductive.
 - Suspensions can lead to academic disengagement and encourage students to drop out.⁶⁸
 - Expulsions are ineffective interventions⁶⁹ and lead to a variety of life-long consequences including impaired social development, increased dropout rates, hindered academic achievement, and exacerbated negative attitudes towards school.⁷⁰
- Disciplinary policies disproportionately target students of color at North Allegheny⁷¹
- Teacher-based actions:
 - The North Allegheny Code of Conduct asks teachers to: “Enforce the Code of Conduct consistently.”⁷²
 - Implicit bias contributes to disproportionate targeting.⁷³
 - These biases can also affect students’ academic outcomes.⁷⁴

⁶⁴ Wallace, Kelly. *Study: Racial bias might start as early as preschool*. CNN, September 28, 2016. Accessed on December 6, 2017. Available at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/28/health/racial-bias-preschool/index.html> .

⁶⁵ Balingit, Moriah. “Racial Disparities in School Discipline Are Growing, Federal Data Show.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 25 Apr. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/racial-disparities-in-school-discipline-are-growing-federal-data-shows/2018/04/24/67b5d2b8-47e4-11e8-827e-190efaf1f1ee_story.html.

⁶⁶ U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. “Data Snapshot: School Discipline.” March 2014.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Anne-Marie Iselin, “Research on School Suspension” (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Family Impact Seminar, Duke University Center for Child and Family Policy, 2010).

⁶⁹ NAEYC. *Standing Together Against Suspension & Expulsion in Early Childhood: Resources*. National Association for the Education of Young Children, DC.

⁷⁰ HHS and DOE. *POLICY STATEMENT ON EXPULSION AND SUSPENSION POLICIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS*. p. 3. Department of Education, DC.

⁷¹ Ed.gov published survey data from North Allegheny, 2015

⁷² North Allegheny 2019 Code of Conduct

⁷³ Kirk, Mimi. “When Teachers Punish Black Kids More Severely Than White Kids.” *Bloomberg City Lab*, 11 Dec. 2017.

⁷⁴ Ulrich Boser, Megan Wilhelm, and Robert Hanna, “The Power of the Pygmalion Effect: Teachers’ Expectations Strongly Predict College Completion” (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2014).

- Teacher training is effective at addressing this issue.⁷⁵
- Policy-based actions:
 - Because of their lack of efficacy and harmful repercussions, suspensions and expulsions should be limited; Pittsburgh Public Schools, for example, banned suspensions for “nonviolent offenses for students in kindergarten through second grade.”⁷⁶
 - The way language is used and what type of language is considered polite vary between cultures.⁷⁷
 - There are racial and cultural differences in what is defined as good behavior.⁷⁸
 - Because of bias and cultural differences,⁷⁹ more subjective infractions, or those with greater room for interpretation, are particularly harmful for students of color.⁸⁰
 - Dress codes can unfairly target students who are not of the cultural majority.⁸¹

Actionables:

- **Require** teachers to examine their biases and how that affects their targeting of students (see [Diversity Training](#)).
- **Adopt** school-wide, preventive and positive discipline policies, such as Restorative Practices (sample [resource](#))⁸² and school-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (sample [resource](#)).⁸³
- **Revise** the NASD Code of Conduct to limit suspensions, expulsions, and other removals so that they are only used as a last resort for the most serious behaviors.
- **Clarify** terminology in the Code of Conduct that may be unfairly interpreted to target students of color or differently abled students.
- **Define or remove** terms in the NASD Middle School Dress Code⁸⁴ that can be interpreted in discriminatory ways.

⁷⁵ Gregory, Anne, et al. “Closing the Racial Discipline Gap in Classrooms by Changing Teacher Practice.” *School Psychology Review*, vol. 45, no. 2, June 2016, pp. 171–191., doi:10.17105/spr45-2.171-191.

⁷⁶ Behrman, Elizabeth. “City Schools No Longer Will Suspend Youngest Students.” *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, 20 Dec. 2017.

⁷⁷ “[Differences in cultural expectations and styles.](#)” *Educational Psychology*.

⁷⁸ Schwartz, Wendy. “School Practices for Equitable Discipline of African American Students.” *ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education New York NY*, September 2000.

⁷⁹ Government Accountability Office. “K-12 EDUCATION: Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities.” 4 April 2018.

⁸⁰ Constance A. Lindsay and Cassandra M.D. Hart. 2017. “[Exposure to Same-Race Teachers and Student Disciplinary Outcomes for Black Students in North Carolina.](#)” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 39(3), 485-510.

⁸¹ Barrett, Kira. “[When School Dress Codes Discriminate.](#)” *NEA Today*, 24 July 2018.

⁸² A Joint Project of The Atlantic Philanthropies and The Schott Foundation . (2014, March). [Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positives Discipline in Schools \(A Guide for Educators\)](#) [PDF]. National Education Association.

⁸³ Center on Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports: [Getting Started](#) (2019).

⁸⁴ [North Allegheny Middle School Dress Code](#)

Anti-Racist Education and Curriculum

Anti-Racism Instruction

Goal: Include anti-racism as a core component of the curriculum at all levels of schooling.

Rationale:

- Students perceive race, starting at a young age.⁸⁵
 - Age: 3-4⁸⁶
 - Children can understand the difference between all races, including their own and those of others.
 - Children form alliances based on racial groups.
 - Age: 5⁸⁷
 - Children can understand the difference between regular meanness and racial meanness.
 - Children internalize eurocentric values.
 - Children become afraid to talk about race.
 - Children know that it is better to be white in society.
- Because students do perceive race, we do them a disservice by not talking about it.
 - Many children want to talk about race but feel unable to do so.⁸⁸
- Students tend to stick with people who look like them.⁸⁹
- Must be anti-racist, other methods alone do not work:
 - Color blindness (or power-blind sameness) does not work—children notice race no matter what and silence around the topic forces children to internalize race as a taboo topic⁹⁰; denies students' racial identities.⁹¹
 - Multiculturalism reduces race to culture and customs and does not address racism or white privilege.⁹²

⁸⁵ Clark, Kenneth B. and Mamie P. Clark. *Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children*. Julia Rosenwald Fund. 1940-1941.

⁸⁶ Derman-Sparks, Louise. *Stages in Children's Development of Racial/Cultural Identity and Attitudes*. 2012.

⁸⁷ Harvey, Jennifer. *RAISING WHITE KIDS: Bringing up Children in a Racially Unjust America*. Abingdon, 2019.

⁸⁸ Bronson, Po, and Ashley Merryman. *NurtureShock: New Thinking about Children*. Twelve, 2011.

⁸⁹ Ramsey, Patricia G. *Teaching and Learning in a Diverse World*. p. 40. Teachers College Press, New York, 1998 (2).

⁹⁰ Derman-Sparks, Louise; Higa, Carol Tanaka; Sparks, Bill. *Children, Race, and Racism: How Race Awareness Develops*. Early Childhood Equity Alliance.; see also; Harvey, Jennifer. *RAISING WHITE KIDS: Bringing up Children in a Racially Unjust America*. Abingdon, 2019.

⁹¹ Ferlazzo, Larry. "Saying 'I Don't See Color' Denies the Racial Identity of Students," *Education Week*. (2 Feb, 2020).

⁹² Angelina E. Castagno, "Multicultural Education and the Protection of Whiteness," *American Journal of Education* 120, no. 1 (November 2013): 101-128.

- Anti-racist teaching has students understand past and present racism and discrimination from economic, structural, and historical perspectives to confront inequality⁹³
- Benefits not just students of color, but all students
 - Diverse education helps benefit “mainstream [...] students to increase their academic achievement and to develop more positive intergroup attitudes and values”⁹⁴

Actionables:

- **Prepare** teachers to understand the barriers systemic racism (see [Diversity Training](#))
- **Prepare** teachers to have difficult conversations about race (see [Diversity Training](#))
- **Require** teachers to activate student sociopolitical consciousness in all classes for at least 30 minutes a week; this can be accomplished by
 - *Fostering* students’ critical thinking skills based on evidence
 - *Encouraging* students to question the ways in which society has influenced what they are learning
 - *Integrating* diverse content into lessons (see also [Comprehensive History](#) and [Elevating Diverse Voices](#))
 - Among other techniques.
- **Institute** explicitly anti-racist instruction in at least one subject area (such as ELA or social studies) per grade level for a total duration of 4 weeks (which may be broken up as necessary);
 - Instruction should:
 - Include explicit instruction on discrimination and its causes (sample [resource](#))⁹⁵
 - Foster crucial conversations about race without burdening students of certain social identities to explain concepts of evidence
 - Be scaffolded and age-appropriate (sample [resource](#))
 - Multimedia materials should be incorporated; resources for doing so include, but are not limited to:
 - Anti-racism resources curated by non-Black allies and vetted by Black activists: bit.ly/ANTIRACISMRESOURCES
 - A comprehensive guide by The Center for Racial Justice in Education: <https://centerracialjustice.org/resources/black-history-month-resource-guide-for-educators-and-families/>
 - College of Dupage Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Teaching Resources: <https://library.cod.edu/c.php?g=952068&p=6875935>

⁹³ McGregor, J. "The Effect of Role Playing and Anti-Racist Teaching on Student Racial Prejudice: A Meta Analysis of Research." *Journal of Educational Research* 86, no. 4 (1993): 215-226.

⁹⁴ Banks, James A. *Race, Culture, and Education*. p. 13. Routledge, May 27, 2006.

⁹⁵ [Race & Ethnicity](#). (n.d.).

Comprehensive History

Goal: Teach comprehensive history, centering BIPOC voices and experiences in Social Studies.

Rationale:

- “By having a clearer understanding of the root of much of the racism in this country, we can be better equipped to dismantle harmful structures and institutions.”⁹⁶
- “Ignorance about the extent of racism in history might explain why some people perceive less racism today than others.”⁹⁷
- Curricula can reproduce white privilege and harmful stereotypes “through misinterpretations of history”⁹⁸
- Teaching comprehensive history is part of the anti-racist education described [above](#)

Actionables:

General Recommendations

- **Present** racism as a present force in today’s society, not a relic of the past.
- **Decrease** reliance on outdated textbooks
- **Take advantage of** subscription databases and online resources
- **Encourage** students to take time to examine the context and causes of historical events, and reflect on how those events affect society today
- **Teach** events from a more diverse range of perspectives and emphasize the *human* aspect of history to
 - *Help* students understand the dehumanizing nature of chattel slavery, the slave trade, and Jim Crow racial-violence
 - *Connect* them with historical figures who have a different race or ethnicity
- **Prepare** teachers to have open conversations in the classroom about race and culture (also see [Diversity Training](#) and [Anti-Racist Instruction](#)), as they may naturally arise
- **Amplify** less prominent BIPOC voices of a variety of experiences, even if those voices may be controversial
- **Discourage** stereotypes by teaching about the richness of other cultures
- **Reflect** upon positive contributions and rich histories of marginalized communities
- **More deeply cover** non-European histories and the American histories of disenfranchised peoples such as BIPOC, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities
- **Monitor** the ways in which diversity is being reflected in social studies curricula by
 - *Having* the diversity committee and MSU make suggestions for teachers about how they can make their lessons more diverse
 - *Creating* space for to students to freely offer criticism of current curricula

⁹⁶ [Let's Talk About Anti-Blackness](#). (n.d.).

⁹⁷ Staff, L. (2013, January 15). [Knowledge of History May Change How You View Racism](#).

⁹⁸ Peters, Michael A. (2015). “Why is My Curriculum White?” *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 47(7).

- *Requiring* diverse perspectives in the history curriculum review process, which takes place every five years

Elementary School Recommendations

- **Portray** historical events and figures accurately in a developmentally appropriate way, particularly:
 - Christopher Columbus,
 - The first Thanksgiving,
 - The Civil War, and
 - The Civil Rights movement.
- **Begin** to instill a critical lens for examining history by having students ask questions such as, but not limited to:
 - Who is telling the story?
 - Who isn't telling the story?
 - What perspective are we not seeing?
 - Why do you think that certain voices are not included in this history?
- **Respect** crafts, songs, and other activities from other cultures when used in class, by teaching their historical and cultural explanations alongside them.
 - **Avoid** culturally appropriative activities or ones that reinforce negative cultural stereotypes.
- **Introduce** students to the American historical figures of all races and ethnicities.
- **Discourage** stereotypes by teaching about the richness of other cultures.

Middle School Recommendations

- **Explore** important events in BIPOC history each day.
- **Explain** historical events in a way that does not strip agency from oppressed groups
- **Connect** lessons from geography (sixth grade) and Ancient World History (seventh grade) to broader social political issues, for example:
 - Who defined the borders of these countries?
 - How do borders impact migration?
 - Why do you think contributions from this society have been largely erased from pop culture?
 - How did ancient society differ from present society in terms of race and class?
- **Include** a more full picture of American history (eighth grade) that does not over-simplify or sanitize it. For example:
 - “Discovery” of America: How were the indigenous people of the Americas treated and depicted?
 - Slavery: How did slavery start and expand? How were Black slaves stripped of their humanity? How does it impact America today?

- Civil War: How had slavery become such a divisive issue in America? What role did Black people play in the Civil War in the North and South? What role did White and Black people play in abolition? How did both Northerners and Southerners reflect racist ideals?

High School Recommendations

1. **Introduce** students to important BIPOC, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities (even those who were controversial), such as, but not limited to:
 - a. Fredrick Douglass, Edward Bouchet, Jane Bolin, Marsha P. Johnson, Claudette Colvin, Megdar Evers, Daisy Bates, Malcolm X, Julian Bond, Mavis Staples, Bayard Rustin, George Washington Carver, and Matthew Henson, Katherine Johnson, Madame C.J. Walker, Grace Lee Boggs, Garrett Morgan, Henrietta Lacks, Lonnie Jackson, Harvey Milk, Frank Kameny, Carrie Elizabeth Buck, and Pauli Murray.
2. **Include** the contributions of BIPOC, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities whenever possible.
3. **Do not sanitize or gloss over** the treatment of indigenous Americans, slavery, abolition, the Civil Rights movement, Japanese internment, Social Darwinism, the LGBTQ+ Rights movement, and the Disability Rights movement.
4. **Illustrate** how historical events influence present day racism, including, but not limited to, topics such as:
 - a. Slave patrols
 - b. Penal labor and the prison industrial complex
 - c. The violence of the Jim Crow era
 - d. The war on drugs
 - e. Redlining and predatory loans
 - f. De-facto residential segregation and the segregation of schools
5. **Promote** sociology, psychology, government, and multicultural experience classes.
 - a. **Explicitly** discuss the role of social-identity in these subjects.
 - b. **Include** topics such as:
 - i. Cycle of socialization
 - ii. Discrimination in hiring practices
 - iii. Implicit biases
 - iv. Psychology of racism
 - v. Voter suppression
6. **Open** more opportunities for students to take AP Human Geography and Honors World Culture.
 - a. **Increase** study of culture and underrepresented histories within these classes, particularly Native American, Polynesian, Inuit, Latinx, South Asian, and Southeast Asian cultures and histories.

7. **Consider** making classes like Modern American History and Multicultural Experiences more challenging and award honors weightage to increase interest and enrollment.

Elevating Diverse Voices

Goal: Ensure that in all areas of the curriculum, BIPOC voices, contributions, and experiences are taught.

Rationale:

- Allowing students to see the faces of people with different backgrounds represented visually in the classroom (be it in books, pictures, videos, etc.) can help them challenge stereotypes and become better at identifying “individual differences among cross-race groups.”⁹⁹
- Students who identify with these voices are positively impacted as “relevant, meaningful activities that both engage students emotionally and connect with what they already know are what help build neural connections and long-term memory storage”¹⁰⁰
- Literary experts have been demanding more diverse books for over 50 years, especially as “what was once defined as ‘common’ — middle class, white, cisgender people — is no longer the reality in our country.”¹⁰¹
- “When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see that we can celebrate both our difference and our similarities, because together they are what makes us all human.”¹⁰²
- Students notice the underrepresentation,¹⁰³ which is particularly harmful because curriculum can “reinforce old notions of assumed white supremacy.”¹⁰⁴
- “A healthy curriculum includes a variety of authors, who present a variety of characters reflecting the full breadth of human experience. This is what will best serve students of all races in our classrooms.”¹⁰⁵

Actionables:

- **Ensure** that the English curriculum for all grades includes books written by BIPOC authors, across varying genres and perspectives.
 - **Do not limit** the inclusion of BIPOC authors to units solely about or dedicated to BIPOC authors.
 - **Assess** the diversity of each text taught using a questionnaire developed by the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Teaching Tolerance project which evaluates texts

⁹⁹ Ramsey, Patricia G. *Teaching and Learning in a Diverse World*. pp. 118-119. Teachers College Press, New York, 1998 (2).

¹⁰⁰ Bernard, Sara. (1 December 2010). “Science Shows Making Lessons Relevant Really Matters.” *George Lucas Educational Foundation*.

¹⁰¹ Anderson, Jill. (Fall 2019). “Hooked on Classics.” *Harvard Ed Magazine*.

¹⁰² Rudine Sims Bishop. (1990). *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*

¹⁰³ Anderson, Jill. (Fall 2019). “Hooked on Classics.” *Harvard Ed Magazine*.

¹⁰⁴ Tatum, Beverly Daniel. (2007). “Can We Talk about Race?”

¹⁰⁵ Nuremberg, David. (2020). “What Does Injustice Have to Do with Me?”

based on the four domains of anti-bias education: identity, diversity, justice, and action.¹⁰⁶

- **Teach** intersectional texts and have students reflect on how the different identities of the author and/or character contribute to their experiences.
- **Do not teach** texts in a vacuum.
 - Draw connections between the experiences presented in the text to the modern-day.
 - When teaching work from different eras, highlight distinctions between the historical cultural practices illustrated in the text and present-day customs.
- **Include** texts that are relevant to current socio-political issues, such as police brutality (e.g. *The Hate U Give*, *Dear Martin*, and *All American Boys*).
- *These recommendations should also apply to media such as movies, plays, and shows.*
- **Highlight** contributions of BIPOC, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities in all subjects, including, but not limited to, science and math.
- **Ensure** heritage celebrations accurately portray the experiences of marginalized communities.
 - **Start locally**: plan field trips and lessons around landmarks and historical sites of significance to BIPOC communities in Pittsburgh including, but not limited to, the Black history exhibit at the Heinz History Center and the African American Cultural Center.
 - **Plan** panels, events, and fundraisers featuring speakers and facilitators of color from outside the district.
 - **Create** and distribute posters to display in school libraries, classrooms, and hallways that provide information about the heritage celebrations and marginalized communities and motivational quotes and stories from marginalized communities.
 - **Utilize** heritage months to teach students about influential historical figures of color and pivotal events in BIPOC history in the United States.
 - **Showcase** documentaries and movies that display a variety of BIPOC experiences.
- **Showcase** diverse visual artists and musicians.
 - **Have** students listen to and analyze song lyrics about current events.
 - **Engage** with political art, both historical and modern.
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¹⁰⁶ [Reading Diversity](#). (n.d.).

Additional Supplements

The following proposal is supplemental and was submitted by students for inclusion in this document and consideration by the school board. The proposal is outside the scope of the petition.

STUDENT JUDICIARY COMMITTEE: A Proposal for Rehabilitative Justice

A Student Judiciary Committee brings together the complainant and respondent and allows for an open conversation among students on how best to proceed given non-academic, non-violent disciplinary violations. Such a committee would be tasked with meeting regularly and holding disciplinary hearings for students before any decision or punishment is imposed by the administration. The committee would listen to all parties involved, pinpoint sources of the conflict, and engage in conflict resolution and restorative justice, culminating in recommendations to the administration, which would fall in line with the standards held in the code of conduct.

Each student on this committee would be appointed by administration and would be held to the highest academic, moral, and ethical standards. Each hearing would be recorded and confidential; the students on this committee would receive no advance information of the cases facing them during each session. At the conclusion of these hearings, the recommendations would be provided to the administration with time for explanations for the recommendations. Furthermore, the committee would work closely with the administration to advise on changes to the student code of conduct each year—a document which should be dynamic, living, and ever-changing.

This system has proved popular in university systems and schools around the country, including, but not limited to, the Swarthmore College¹⁰⁷, Bennington College¹⁰⁸, Stanford University¹⁰⁹, and high schools around the country.

North Allegheny should consider the creation of a Student Judiciary Committee at NAI and NASH, in the spirit of self-governance and investment into the student body:

1. An existing culture of leadership and servitude.

The application of such a committee to a student body capable of leadership and servitude—evidenced by projects ranging from TigerThon to Project Water—is clear. North Allegheny would be remiss to not utilize the talents of student leaders to address non-academic, non-violent disciplinary violations in a non-punitive way. The work of the Student Judiciary Committee would fit in with on-going student-led initiatives like The North Allegheny Council of Organizations (NACO), an overarching leadership group designed to create a more inclusive and interconnected student population¹¹⁰, through which the leaders of each club discuss problems and devise solutions alongside the administration through their collective expertise of the school climate and student body. A form of self-government beyond a single organization, NACO promotes civil discussion and engagement; it also bridges a large gap in conversation that exists between students and

¹⁰⁷ [Student Conduct Policies and Procedures](#). (n.d.). Swarthmore College.

¹⁰⁸ [Judicial & Restorative Justice](#) | Bennington College. (n.d.). Bennington College.

¹⁰⁹ [The Student Judicial Charter of 1997](#), | Office of Community Standards. (2013, October). Stanford University.

¹¹⁰ Marsalis, R. (2020, March 2). [NASH's First Super-Club](#). NASH Upoar.

administration. Additionally, the NACO model can be used to resurrect NAI United, a retired, similar initiative at the Intermediate High School.

The Student Judiciary Committee would function as an organ separate from any single extracurricular activity in an effort to show autonomy and transparency at the highest level. We recommend implementing the committee into the NACO organizational structure to demonstrate student initiative and autonomy of thought; implementing the committee into NACO would provide a stronger sense of community and responsibility for students, which would lead to higher standards of behavioral ethics.

2. The inapplicability of punitive action to all disciplinary violations.

While punitive action is required for more severe forms of discrimination and harassment, minor transgressions addressed by a rehabilitative approach lead to education and growth of the individual. Not only will this promote a learning experience from a negative situation, it will also be more effective to gain an understanding as to why a particular slur or action is hurtful to another individual. The issues of race, microaggressions, and stereotypes are nuanced, and the key to expelling hurtful actions and mindsets of students is taking a compassionate approach to correction, which prioritizes: conflict resolution, a safe space to have difficult conversations, learning from mistakes, and student accountability. This can be facilitated by administration or even a specific counselor equipped to handle these types of situations within the elementary and middle schools.

3. The promotion of individual responsibility.

Facing a panel of peers ultimately provides a sense of accountability to each individual student, and students will feel an obligation to hold themselves to a higher standard. Students will benefit and develop from the opportunity to engage in conflict resolution training, bias workshops, and other training. Strategically investing directly into the student body will empower students to speak out, and conflict resolution will serve to stem the ignorant conversations that occur casually among students.

Through training, investment, and a rehabilitative approach to dealing with a lack of information and experience, the Student Judiciary Committee can be an essential and positive addition to our district.