

ISD Student Equity Council

October Affinity Group Monthly Reports

Students of Color

The Students of Color Affinity Group has officially met three times this month with 20 active members. We have brainstormed ideas and broken up into four project focus groups: Racial Awareness Art, Student Interviews, Development for Teachers in Racist Situations, and Book Drive.

The Racial Awareness Art project has goals of uplifting artists of color, from ISD students to all underappreciated artists of color in history, through the creation of a zine as well as featuring them on our social media. Art, whether it be in the form of a painting or a piece of poetry, is an extremely compelling medium in which people of color can share their experiences. Our next steps include researching artists of color to feature and finding a way to reach out to ISD student artists and planning for the integration of art in schools when students go back.

The Student Interviews project was created to share the stories of ISD students who have experienced racism in the school district to shed light on the urgency and reality of the racism prevalent here. We plan to collect these experiences through a video format, and our next steps include continuing to organize our timeline and course of action for students to participate and admin to listen, as they are our target audience.

Our third project, Development for Teachers in Racist Situations, aims to address the lack of standards and expectations of teacher response when something racist happens in their classroom. We plan to put together a presentation or website that teachers can reference so they can appropriately address racist situations, like when the N-word comes up in literature or when someone says something racially insensitive in class. The next steps for this project include researching methods of de-escalation and conflict resolution, the history of slurs, stigmas surrounding race discussions, the importance of body language and tone, contacting the equity department at the school district to see what is already being done, and much more.

The final project the Students of Color group is working on is the Book Drive. The Book Drive is a council wide project, with goals of providing the community with diverse, representative, and educational books however our affinity group is focusing on collecting books

surrounding racial justice. We are currently compiling a list of books and color coding them by racial group in order to ensure full representation.

LGBTQ+

The LGBTQ+ Affinity Group met five times (including the final week of September) with additional subgroup meetings at various times. This group has eighteen members, around sixteen of those active. Many of these meetings have involved brainstorming of potential projects and outreach, and the group has divided into five subgroups to cover these tasks and ideas.

The Amenities and Clothing subgroup is researching the possibility of a clothing is genderless campaign as well as a clothing drive. There is also research being done into changing bathroom signage to be more gender neutral.

The Books subgroup is planning to do a book drive to expand the representation of LGBTQ+ books in different areas. They are looking at what books may be useful to have as well as contacting local libraries to see what books they may already own.

The Curriculum subgroup is researching the current curriculum in multiple subject areas to see what changes could be made, such as psychology, history, and health classes. One area of focus is education about intersex individuals. There is some research into state/local standards about curriculums, and discussion about the best ways to implement these changes.

The Names and Pronouns subgroup has had progress with names in yearbooks at Issaquah High School - students can now fill out a Google form to indicate if they would like a preferred name in the yearbook. It is too late this school year to implement this change in other ISD schools, but it will be a goal for next fall. This group is now working on designing accessories such as pronoun pins that will be ordered when school returns to an in-person format.

The Resources and Networking subgroup is connecting with other local LGBTQ+ groups such as high schools' GSAs, and has plans to connect with staff equity groups, student equity groups, and ASBs as well as looking into guest speakers. There is also some exploration of making informational materials for outreach more accessible.

Low-Income and Homelessness

The Low-Income and Homeless Affinity Group has met three times this month with 16 active members. We compiled ideas concerning class-related issues in the Issaquah School

District and have been working on creating projects to address these issues. The projects we are currently working on include a Printing Project, creating a presentation for teachers and staff, a student survey, and a safe place project.

The Printing Project concerns the way low income and homeless students have been cut off from available printing since the start of the pandemic. We want to emphasize the importance of flexibility in learning, neurodivergent students and kinetic learners would benefit greatly from having access to physical materials. Additionally, our research has concluded that printed materials can improve recall of information, and that doing all your schoolwork on a screen is not only not stimulating, but can also cause issues like digital eye strain and impact the ability to sleep well. Overall, Low-Income and Homeless students deserve to have choice in their learning in order to facilitate individual needs. To address this we plan to have teachers put on their canvas page any printed materials students may need for two units in advance in PDF format. Then, set up google forms for each high school through which students can link the PDF materials they need and then set up a time to have it printed by their school's administration. We have constructed an email outlining the above information in more detail, as well as proposing our plan.

We have just concluded research on our teacher presentation. We are planning to present the issues that low income and homeless students are currently facing during the pandemic and how teachers can better accommodate and be mindful of these barriers. We will be doing this by creating a powerpoint video that we have our members voice over to present the information. This would likely be sent out through an email to staff, though we have also considered asking staff to present it during their board meetings.

Our student survey has already been created. We plan to ask that it be sent out to students emails through E-News, and that individuals who identify as low income or experience homelessness will complete it. The survey concerns any needs or wants that these students have, anything that they feel would make them more successful in learning and any difficulties or feedback they have for online learning. It also concerns what a "safe space" would look like to these students, whether or not it would be helpful/they would utilize a safe place, and if they can access transportation to get to one.

This moves into our next and biggest project--the Safe Place project. We are partnering with the Garage Teen Cafe in order to set up a youth shelter in Issaquah, as well as two

additional sites in Renton and Sammamish. The nearest youth shelter is in Kirkland, and the experience of having to be sent so far away from their community, the possibility of being turned away, difficulties with being transported there, and the issue of trying to connect with learning from such a far distance can be traumatic for students. We want to create a shelter and space for youth that is specific to these communities (Issaquah, Sammamish, Renton) and the needs of students in those areas. Through our perspective as students, we have identified several areas in which we believe students need support, including amenities (hygienic equipment, school supplies, learning spaces etc.), clothing, transportation, food, access to technology, and support services (extracurriculars, counseling, college guidance, trained adults in PPE etc.). The sites in Renton and Sammamish would be satellites to our Issaquah location, and we would partner with local businesses in order to provide this space. The biggest monetary barrier for those sites would be paying trained staff. So far, we have had several members in contact with members of the Garage to discuss this project and we have presented this project, as well as our other endeavors, to the Kiwanis association.

Mental Health & Illness

The Mental Health & Illness Affinity Group has officially met four times this month with 21 active members. We have brainstormed ideas and broken up into four project focus groups: 504 Plan Accessibility, Mental Health Check-in Forms, Destigmatizing Mental Illness in Curriculum, and the Book Drive. These projects are focused heavily on Mental Illness, as we are planning to start a separate Affinity group for students with physical and cognitive disabilities.

The 504 Plan Accessibility Project intends to make all students aware of the 504 Plan resources that are available to them if applicable, with new importance due to the online learning environment. Next steps include researching the current 504 Plan processes and getting into contact with district counseling officials.

Our members working on the Mental Health Check-in Form project are currently creating a Google form for all teachers to include on their Canvas pages so that students can fill them out if they have a mental health issue that is conflicting with schoolwork, basically letting teachers know if students need more support or accommodations. We are currently working on coming up with the questions that will be included on that form.

The Destigmatizing Mental Illness in Curriculum project aims to address the stigmas and lack of comprehensive education surrounding mental illness and mental disability in schools. Our next steps will be reaching out to curriculum auditors in the district as well as contacting each school's ASB to figure out how they plan SEL lessons surrounding mental health.

The Book Drive, again, is a district wide project so the Mental Health & Illness affinity group is focusing on collecting books surrounding positive representation of mental illness and mental disability.

Immigrants and Culture

The Immigrants and Culture Affinity group has met four times over the course of the month of October. There are currently 12 active members. Many members of this affinity group are either first or second generation immigrants who desire to address inequities regarding barriers immigrant students and families face in the school system. Collectively, the group has started the following projects: Crayons, Cultural Decorations, and Peer Tutors.

The Crayons Project: a seemingly minor yet impactful project regarding the availability of skin tones in crayons for elementary age students. The urgency for this project comes from the affinity group desiring a more inclusive curriculum in lower grade levels; coloring projects are often implemented and students often have to choose between the availability of 3 skin-tone colors, creating an exclusive environment in which their skin tones aren't represented. Additionally, this amplifies colorism in schools in which students feel as though they have to shape themselves in a skin tone more normalized in society versus others. The affinity group researched each school, taking into account the number of students and teachers per school, to measure an approximate number of crayon boxes. This helps give a better idea of distribution and costs of the project. As of now, the group is contemplating the most efficient and plausible way to collect such supplies, as funding/donations are a logistical issue.

Cultural Decorations: Schools often decorate their halls and buildings once certain holidays come around, such as Thanksgiving or Christmas. However, this decor only acknowledged holidays celebrated by American cultures or predominant religions, being exclusive to students who celebrate a minority culture or religion. An example could be of displaying a Christmas tree in the school, dismissing Haunnakuah. For this, the group wants to compile more inclusive cultural decorations, contemplating a cultural corner in school buildings.

This area would have decorations for minority religions as well as an educational presentation to inform students about the decoration. For example, the meaning and usage of the menorah, or the altar for Day of the Dead. The group is currently completing a list of holidays/observations and researching culturally significant emblems.

Peer Tutors: Immigrant students of this affinity group have mentioned desiring the aid of another student who speaks their native language. This student would aid in language development, serve as a guide, and create a more inclusive school environment. This is very helpful for immigrant students and students whose first language isn't English. The group is considering a community-oriented program in which students in ISD can sign up to be a tutor.

Religious Awareness

The Religious Awareness Affinity Group has officially met three times this month with 7 active members. Many of the members are religious or spiritual minorities who work to provide accommodations for religious or spiritual practices as well as awareness of holidays and other important events in the christian-dominated system. This month, we created a system for students to submit religious spiritual holidays for posts on our social media to spread awareness along with working on the Book Drive.

The holiday social media post system was generated to make sure that everyone, no matter their faith, is celebrated and recognized. By utilizing social media to access as many students in the ISD as possible, we are able to get student input on their religious celebrations. With that knowledge we have researchers who gather information about the holiday and pass it off to the social media team who creates the post and distributes it to the student body. The system will be effective for the duration of the year and will continue to be open. After years of having their important holidays swept under the rug or ignored, we want religious minorities to be seen.

The final project the Religious Awareness group is working on is the Book Drive. The Book Drive is a council wide project, with goals of bringing representation to minority students and education about topics that have been white-washed or glossed over in the current curriculum. As an affinity group, we are focusing on collecting books surrounding representation of students who celebrate minority religion and bring awareness to minority

religions in history. We are currently compiling a list of books for all ages that address the aforementioned topics and monitoring them for trigger warnings.

First-Generation Students

The First-Generation Students Affinity Group has met officially one time this month. This group has three active members. We have brainstormed ideas and the current main issue we are working to resolve is immigrants having a hard time finding the resources to apply to colleges.

We are planning to hold a question and answer seminar with college counselors and students who have already applied to college as first gen applicants. To begin planning this project, we discussed the questions that families may have in regards to college applications and went through Common App to discover any sections that require a further explanation. Next steps for this project would include: generating a document with possible questions and topics to discuss, emailing potential presenters, and inviting first gen students to this event.

Social Media

The Social Media team does not meet over Zoom and rather functions as a group of around eight individuals who can choose what they would like to contribute to the council's online presence. We continue to create informational content on our Instagram (@isd.equity) per affinity group requests. As of October 31, we have around 412 followers and a total of nine posts up. So far we have done multiple posts for religious/cultural holidays and hope to continue to expand the amount of content we put out. We have also begun forming and integrating a website team that will manage and update our website (isdequity.wixsite.com/website) starting November.

New Affinity Groups Forming in the Next Month

- Women's Empowerment
- Physical and Cognitive Disabilities