

ISD Student Equity Council -- March 2021 Monthly Report

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Students of Color

The Students of Color Affinity Group has officially met five times this month with 13 active members. We have dedicated work to three project groups: Racial Awareness Art, Student Interviews, and Teacher Development.

The Racial Awareness Art Project has been continuing to work on our goals of uplifting artists of color, from ISD students to all underappreciated artists of color in history. We are featuring them on our Instagram account, through story and feed posts. We've recently gotten many student submissions of art and hope to do more outreach and promotion to receive more submissions. We are also working to create more educational content on our Instagram feed on art through a racial lens (racist themes in art, art movements by BIPOC groups, etc.), and have started posting them every couple of weeks starting this month. We have also begun brainstorming for a possible zine, hoping that we can tackle that project soon with increased involvement from the student body. Once hybrid school starts, we plan on putting up flyers to advertise for student art amongst the physical high schools.

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 creating a video "trailer" to advertise this opportunity to students, format our interview questions, and continue outreach to gather more interviews and interviewees.

The Development for Teachers in Racist Situations Project 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. After collecting and organizing the responses from a survey sent to ISD teachers asking what they specifically would like help with regarding racist situations, we have started research on these new topics.

LGBTQ+

The LGBTQ+ Affinity Group has officially met 4 times this month with 5 active members. We have dedicated work to four project groups, and one affinity project: Amenities and Clothing, Curriculum, Names and Pronouns, and the Organizational Project.

The Amenities and Clothing Project remains on hold as of now for the most part, but is continuing to work with the Women's Empowerment Group on the Menstrual Products Project. With the new hybrid schedule, there is potential for picking up projects which were previously put on the backburner due to the lack of in-person school.

The LGBTQ+ Curriculum Group is now working within the Council-wide Curriculum Project, keeping up with check-ins and asynchronous work. We are looking into more areas of the ISD curriculum which lacks LGBTQ+ representation, and deciding where and how we can improve it. As we have stressed before, it is extremely important to have this representation in school's, and given that the curriculum is one of the most direct points of influence on students, we find we need to make it more flexible and equitable to students of all different groups.

The Names and Pronouns Group is currently working on a new project: the pronouns glossary. After doing much work in regards to normalizing pronouns across the district (and we will continue to do so) we realized how clear it is that not everyone is educated on the basics of pronouns. We are creating this glossary as a resource which can be used for staff, students, student families, and anyone else who chooses to use it. The contents of this project include education on all kinds of pronouns, how to use them, and why everyone needs to respect others' pronouns. This will also be used as a resource for the other names and pronouns project currently in progress: the presentation/SEL lesson, which covers the importance of preferred names and pronouns, similar to the presentation done in August, but this time with additional training and resources.

The Organizational Project is moving along and working to decide which organizations would be the best to partner with on projects. The main lead for this project is currently on break, but we plan on continuing with this as much as we can.

Low-Income & Homelessness

The Low-Income and Homelessness Affinity Group has officially met six times this month with 11 active members. We have dedicated work to three project groups: The Safe Space Project, the Resource Project, and the Survey Project.

The Safe Space Project began in the summer prior to online-learning, with a concern of the lack of a physical safe space for physically displaced students and youth, as well as other at-risk groups. Online-learning did not create equitable issues regarding education with homeless and low-income youth, but merely exacerbated it. Thus, the group has worked creating two physical day-centers and safe havens for youth, as well as initiating a Youth Home and a local Youth Shelter to best serve and bridge equitable barriers of low-income youth and youth experience homelessness. Recently, the project has been approved by the Garage Board after the group presented all past work and planning efforts; the group is currently working with brokers for two spaces, and has compiled a Youth Home Committee of leaders in the ISD area to initiate the Youth Home project. The target release date of the two day centers is in May, thus the group is finalizing the efforts and executions of the Safe Space project.

The Resources Project acknowledges that the core issues of inequities in youth homelessness and socioeconomic inequities is the lack of accessible resources for students. While there have been local organizations to offer amazing resources to youth, using our perspective as students and general statistics, these resources have not successfully reached all youth who would benefit from them. The issue: direct and accessible outreach efforts. To bridge this gap, the Resource group has recently been collaborating with the PTSA Council to gain student voice and perspective on outreach programs, as well as initiating firm efforts for more effective outreach. Additionally, the group has used their own platform as a Council to spread awareness on these issues; namely, the group has compiled a formal resource document for schools, counselors, and other organizations to distribute to ALL youth. Using social media, the group crafted a detailed social media post entailing all the resources available for local youth, and will continuously be updating on available resources. Finally, the group crafted a distributable pamphlet to ideally be distributed annually at the beginning of each school year.

The Survey Project recognizes most outreach and program efforts in our local community lack the most crucial component: student and youth voice. Oftentimes, organizations and district efforts centralized around what adults and staff themselves believe are prevalent issues impacting

low-income and physically displaced youth, when the majority have not endured these issues themselves. The impact can cause a blinding ignorance in the community--that efforts have been done, and that nothing else has to be done. Yet consider what youth--the ones who are actually experiencing these issues--have to say. When has youth voice been incorporated in decisions or decided what is needed or what is not needed? When are stories, narrative, and people themselves incorporated in these decisions to depict the severity or necessity of these programs? The Survey Project intends on releasing a district-wide survey for all youth who desire to voice what THEY believe are prevalent conflicts and what THEY believe the school system should prioritize. Using written anecdotes and stories from youth themselves, youth voice is undeniable what should drive the district's equitable efforts--something that has not been done in reasonable amounts.

Mental Health & Illness

The Mental Health & Illness Affinity Group has officially met three times this month with 11 active members. We are continuing work on our three project groups: Mental Health Check-In Form, Destigmatizing Mental Illness, and Teacher Presentations.

The Mental Health Check-in Form Project is pushing a simple yet impactful Google form that would be accessible on every high-school teacher's virtual instruction webpage (most likely Canvas) and provide a more comfortable medium for students to request accommodations from their teachers in the case of mental health/equity-related issues. At times, mental health inequities may inhibit students from achieving their greatest potential in class, and there are weak systems to aid students in these cases. Teachers will be able to collect this information regarding students' needs and struggles from the form in a specific, convenient location at any point during the school year. This project is currently waiting on support and approval from district equity officials before it is implemented. Therefore, we have not met in a while. However, conversations have arisen regarding whether or not we should go directly to high school building equity leads to get this implemented instead of district officials.

The Destigmatizing Mental Illness Project aims to address the stigmas and lack of comprehensive education surrounding mental illness and mental health in schools. However we have not met this month due to low member attendance.

The Teacher Presentations Project was created to come up with small solutions to help alleviate some of the stress that online school is causing students. Simple things such as being supportive towards asynchronous students, providing alternative assignments to online ones, or consistent breakout rooms can add up and make online learning more manageable for students. We met for the first time this month and have created a Google form to reach out to more students regarding ideas and suggestions they have for teachers. We are also planning on reaching out to each high school and asking whether they would like us to directly present our information to staff or instead create a guide document compiling all the info so teachers can read and reference it.

Immigrants & Culture

The Immigrants and Culture Affinity Group has officially met 3 times this month with 8 active members. As we wait to safely continue the Crayons Project in physical schooling, that subgroup has been put on hold. We have continued work on three project groups: the Cultural Decorations Project, the Cultural Foods Project, and the Counselor project.

In Cultural Decorations, we continue to anticipate implementation at the return of in-person school by doing online research and posting about cultural holidays through our Equity Council Instagram. The goal in this project is to help students feel more welcome through representation and educate other students on the various cultures of their peers. And while we are maintaining the ideas of the “Cultural Corner” for when schools return to in-person learning, we continue to be focused on education through social media until then. Our group is currently researching and posting about potential decorations we may bring about schools one day.

The social media food series, endearingly nicknamed “Cultural Food Fridays,” continues as an ongoing project in recognition of food’s role in culture. Issaquah School District students are encouraged to send in submissions for recipe features on @isd.equity’s Instagram account, anonymous or otherwise, that are then turned into stories and compiled for other students to take inspiration from and bring into their own kitchens. This virtual project is the first step of many in the normalization of cultural foods.

The Counselor Project is the affinity group’s newest addition: an extension of the Curriculum Project, we aim to address the lack of education regarding xenophobia within elementary schools. Xenophobic microaggressions begin to develop at a young age, and

specificity is key, because kids need to know that “don’t make fun of cultural food, of accents, of career types, or family structures” is just as important as “don’t bully.” In this project, we’re hoping to elaborate on the vague anti-bullying campaigns at elementary schools to start kids on the right path at a young age, with a focus on cultural sensitivity. This month there has been discussion on the project’s structure, and we are excited to see where it goes from here.

Religious Awareness

The Religious Awareness Affinity Group has officially met 4 times this month with 5 active members. We have dedicated work to two project groups: Holiday Social Media and Minority Holiday Awareness.

The Holiday Social Media Project was generated to ensure 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. This system will be effective for the duration of the year and will continue to be open for holiday requests. In the past month, we have posted about Ostara, Holi, and Maha Shivratri.

The Minority Holiday Awareness Project reached out to the ISD Equity Department to inquire about current systems that are in place to inform teachers about how religious practices could impact students in the classroom. A common pattern we saw in the results of the survey is that many teachers and staff wanted more student perspectives and advice on what accommodations to provide in addition to the calendar provided to the district. In addition to the current district calendar, we will add information regarding suggested accommodations for students who celebrate this holiday. This project has been put on hold due to attendance issues and will regain momentum after onboarding. However, as a short-term project, we have created a system where students can directly inform their teachers about a certain holiday and with that knowledge, teachers will be able to proactively excuse some students from homework for the duration of the holiday. We have drafted an email template for students to email teachers requesting holiday accommodations. For example, if a student requires to be absent for 2 days, the student can ask the teacher for make-up work and request additional help.

Women's Empowerment

The Women's Empowerment Affinity group has officially met 4 times this month with 5 active members. We have dedicated work to two project groups: the Social Media Project and the Sexual Reproductive Products Project.

The Social Media Project... has been working hard for Women's History Month. We initially were hoping to make multiple posts by the end of the month, but that didn't end up happening. We decided to try and make one post every two(ish) weeks instead, and spread them out. We should celebrate women all the time! We have also started to educate ourselves about sexual violence related to Bollywood, as that was suggested for us to look into. After reading more about it, we are hoping to make an Instagram post educating people about it.

The Sexual Reproductive Products Project... has been taking a break from doing any project work and rather taking time to educate ourselves. Every meeting, we dedicate some of our time to either watch a documentary about periods or talk about an article we read together. Thus far, we have read an article about period poverty and watched a few documentaries about it. We also got the thumbs-up from the IHS Feminism Club for a collab, so that will be starting soon. Our communication with them has been slow, so it'll probably be another month or so before we start anything with them.