

A Step By Step Guide For How One Elementary School Formed A Diversity Committee

Compiled by Chiles Elementary School in Gainesville, FL

First steps – initial conversations

- Identify someone that wants to be in charge of this and is willing to do the hard work of building relationships and laying the groundwork over several years to make it work. Part of this work includes doing things like attending seminars, watching podcasts, reading books, etc. to learn about what other places are doing; the other part of this work includes having conversations with people that are different than you (not necessarily PTA people), especially those that are underrepresented in your PTA and school leadership, to find out who else might be interested in this type of project.
- Talk to your school principal. Schedule a meeting. Ask if the school is willing to support this and how (Can the committee meet at school? Have nighttime events? Will the principal send out emails or communications asking for people to participate? How does the principal feel about engaging staff to help? Are there things that are off limits? Etc.). Find out what obstacles the principal anticipates. Find out what attributes your school already has that will help get this off the ground. Ask who else might be good at leading or helping you lead this effort. Ask if there are teachers, etc. that might be interested in helping. Decide if this is a PTA committee or a school committee.
- Find out if your PTA supports having a diversity committee. If so, is there a budget? If not, could it be a school committee? Work closely with PTA president and board to make sure that they are ready to support this – really support it, not just lip service. If they are not, figure out why and see if you can provide information that will help them understand why this is important. If that doesn't work, is there a different way to do it?

Begin to form a committee & reach out to your school community

- Create a steering committee. 5(ish) people that have different identities. Think about gender, race, religion, special needs, work status, education levels, economic levels, sexual orientations, etc. Find a time and a place that everyone is available to meet. That probably doesn't mean 10am at a coffee shop in your neighborhood. It probably means more like before school or at night in a neutral location like the school or on zoom (or another free video meeting service). Establish a common understanding about what a diversity committee is and is not. Talk about how to get people to participate and buy in to the idea. Create some goals for creating a committee.
- Reach out to the school community and invite people to be involved. Things to think about: How will you invite people to participate? Can you use your PTA membership list? Can your principal email the whole school? Can you send home flyers? How do you get people that have not previously been involved in PTA? How do you make sure that a diversity committee is actually a diverse group of people?
- Example of a welcome letter that was sent to the whole school:

{First year}

Dear Families,

One of the missions of the PTA is to advocate for all children in our schools. As part of that mission, it is very important for us to make sure every child feels that he or she is welcome, accepted and celebrated as part of the larger XXXX Community.

At XXXX, we are very lucky that we have a huge diversity of backgrounds, identities and abilities represented in our students and families. As part of the PTA's efforts to celebrate this diversity and continue to build a welcoming and inclusive community, it has created a Diversity Committee. The goal of the Diversity Committee is to help build awareness of our unique attributes, and to celebrate those attributes in a way that builds understanding and empathy in us all.

As part of this initiative, there will be some new additions at XXXX. Starting last week, you will see quotes on the school marquee that highlight the importance of diversity. There will also be weekly segments in the morning announcements that teach us interesting facts about different backgrounds and identities represented at our school. Finally, we are in the planning stages for upcoming events where you will have a chance to teach us about what makes your family unique and special.

How can you be part of this effort? There are three main ways you can help:

- 1) Reach out to us and let us know if your family has a special tradition, culture, or identity that you would like us to highlight in one of our morning announcements.
- 2) Let us know if you would like to participate in the upcoming celebration of diversity (details to be determined) by bringing in information, sharing a food, demonstrating a game or tradition, etc.
- 3) Join us at the upcoming diversity committee meetings. They will be posted on our PTA Facebook page, or you can email XXXX to get added to the email list.

Thanks, and we look forward to hearing from you!

The Diversity Committee XXXX@email address for diversity committee

{Second year}

Dear Families,

One of the missions of the PTA is to advocate for all children in our schools. As part of that mission, it is important for us to make sure every child feels that he or she is welcome, accepted and celebrated as part of the larger XXXX School Community.

At XXXX, we are lucky that we have a huge diversity of backgrounds, identities and abilities represented in our students and families. The goal of the Diversity Committee is to help build awareness of our unique attributes, and to celebrate those attributes in

a way that builds understanding and empathy in us all.

This year, the Diversity Committee will continue our initiatives from last year, such as:

- Providing weekly announcements that highlight different cultures and identities
- Quotes on the school marquee that highlight the importance of diversity
- Monthly calendars that provide resources to teachers about cultural observances that they can highlight in the classrooms
- A book drive to increase library resources that celebrate diversity
- If feasible, a multicultural night in the spring

New this year, we also hope to add:

- Resources and discussions that support our ESE community
- Speakers that will help us learn how to talk to our kids about diversity
- Dive into Diversity Columns on Facebooks and in the PTA Newsletter

How can you be part of this effort?

- Join us at the upcoming diversity committee meetings; Meetings will be posted on our PTA Facebook page
- Email us at [XXXX \[email address for diversity committee\]](mailto:XXXX [email address for diversity committee]) to be added to the email list

EVERYONE is welcome to be part of this initiative. You do not have to be part of PTA to participate. Thanks, and we look forward to hearing from you!

The Diversity Committee

Committee meetings

- You may need to do two times to accommodate different schedules. Maybe one before school at school and one at night via zoom.
- You might (or might not, depending on the principal) want to include your principal in the first meetings.
- Your first meeting should focus on common understanding of diversity and building an agenda that the whole group believes is important.
- If you are not able to attract a diverse group to your first meeting, you can't move forward with the other stuff. The first focus needs to be figuring out to get the right people to the meeting first. Remember that if a diverse group does not show up, it DOES NOT mean that it is people of diverse backgrounds don't want to have a committee that supports diversity. It usually means that they do not feel engaged and/or welcomed and/or comfortable and/or it may not be a time/format they can meet.
- Here are some questions you could ask at the first meeting to get things rolling (and the answers that our group came up with are included):
 - What is diversity and what are some examples? Diversity is differences. Examples: Racial, religious, ability, economic, culture, tradition, unique, political, language,

- regional, education, sexual identity, gender identity, marital status, family composition, work status, neurodiversity, age
- What is inclusion and what are examples? Being accepted and celebrate for differences, understanding and empathy, having a voice. Thanksgiving table example – not just being invited to come, but having a voice at the table and being asked to share one of your own traditions at the table.
 - Examples of how we celebrate diversity? Kindness, good listening, acceptance, self-awareness, festivals, holidays, music, classes, announcements, information sharing, over meals, during greetings
 - What are barriers to inclusivity? Lack of kindness, good listening, acceptance; expectations to conform, lack of education or misinformation, lack of “role models that look like me” – not seeing yourself in your surroundings, segregation
 - What are some short term goal of this committee?
 - Daily activities that reinforce the positive value of diversity
 - Morning announcement “PSAs” about diversity
 - Media center book cart – put together a wish list of books on diversity.
 - Centrum movies that celebrate diversity. Maybe a list of internet resources
 - Home room parent diversity kit – ideas of what to include beyond the normal “snowmen” for holiday parties, etc.
 - Teacher resources list by month so they know when to highlight different cultural events
 - What are some long term goals:
 - Building diversity into the leadership of the school
 - Whole school events that focus on diversity
 - Night time diversity festival
 - Speakers forums

Develop a mission statement

- We had one for kids and one for adults.
 - In words adults can understand: The mission of the Chiles PTA Diversity Committee is to create a more welcoming and inclusive community that supports awareness of our unique attributes, and to celebrates those attributes in a way that builds understanding and empathy in us all.
 - In words that kids can understand: As a student of Chiles Elementary School, I will promote an environment where everyone is respected and appreciated for who they are.

What activities we have done in the first two years

- 1) Weekly PSAs
- 2) Weekly Marquee quotes
- 3) Monthly Diversity Calendar for teachers and staff
- 4) Book Drive

- 5) Multicultural Night
- 6) Mural in the cafeteria
- 7) Speakers (Diversity and Inclusion is for Everyone by Dr. Erica McCray, Identifying and Interrupting Bias by Dr. Kate Ratliff)
- 8) Dive into Diversity monthly column