

Your Stories: Anti-Racism

The BCPVPA strives to be an anti-racist association, and to help build a more inclusive community of educators. Early in 2023, the BCPVPA Ad Hoc Anti-Racism Committee—comprised of BCPVPA members, Board Directors, and senior staff – held their inaugural meeting. The work of the committee includes offering recommendations to the Board about ways in which the BCPVPA can support effective school leadership for racial equity and anti-racism, and support members on how to best deal with issues of racism in their schools.

Our strength comes from our members, as voices on the committee and as leaders in their schools and districts. We asked our members about the stories of the anti-racism initiatives taking place in their school communities. We are sharing the words of leaders in SD 62 (Sooke) and SD 23 (Central Okanagan), and we will continue to share stories in upcoming issues of *Principl(ed)* magazine.





Michaela Mistal

Vice-Principal

SD 62 (Sooke)

As a new PVP team here at Journey Middle School, we spent the first few months getting to know our community, our students, and our staff. It is a unique setting, in a small town just outside of Victoria. As we were learning about our school, a series of incidents occurred that showed the need to approach anti-racism work on a school-wide level. Students at our school experienced racial slurs, microaggressions, racist vandalism, and unfair treatment from their peers. These incidents revealed that work is needed to address the fact that many in the school community do not appear to know the difference between 'non-racist' and 'anti-racist' behaviours, or the difference between 'institutional' racism and 'interpersonal' racism. We needed to devise a way to work with the whole school to help heal and reflect, and to understand racism and the actions required to be anti-racist. As a PVP team, we talked about ways to address these challenges, implicit bias, and overt racism. We have a responsibility to address these issues head-on, and to create an environment where every student feels safe, respected, and valued.



Grade 8 Class during Anti-Bias Film Festival Activities
Journey Middle School, SD 62

"We needed to devise a way to work with the whole school to help heal and reflect, and to understand racism and the actions required to be anti-racist."

In order to foster an environment where racism and discrimination have no place to thrive, we adapted the Anti-Bias film festival created by the Anti-Defamation League to create a connection with our middle school students and promote inclusivity, understanding, and empathy among our students.

Once this mini film festival had been prepared, we focused on one short film per week during school morning announcements after the winter break. Then, each day that week, we followed up through interactive discussions both in the classrooms and shared on announcements via Teams, and students engaged in writing activities, reflections, and small group projects. Each week had a different focus, and facilitated open conversations about race, privilege, and the importance of embracing diversity. We invited both students and a guest speaker from the Speakers Bureau from UVIC (University of Victoria)

to share their personal stories, helping the students to develop a deeper appreciation for different perspectives. In addition, students who were referred to the administration for racist language or vandalism underwent reconciliation activities using the young adult book *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi, and took part in one-to-one conversations, reflections, and activities.

Over time, we have witnessed a change. There is less racist vandalism, and students engage in further conversations and understandings, embracing differences rather than turning to discrimination. We hope to continue this work, creating more learning opportunities as students grow through their years in middle school, creating compassionate, empathetic young humans who understand the power of unity and actively work towards building a more equitable society.

Leader Life Stories

Every leader has a story: what's yours?

The **Leader Life Stories** series in *Principl(ed)* magazine brings together member voices from across the province on a variety of topics.

We want to hear from you!

Do you have an idea for a theme for an upcoming article?

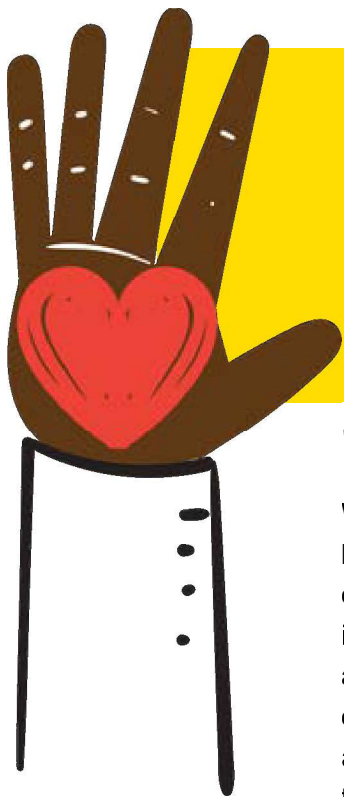
Contact sandra@bcpvpa.bc.ca

Read the November 2022 Leader Life Stories
"Diverse Women in Leadership"



Read the June 2023 Leader Life Stories
"The Family Balance"





David Johnson

Vice-Principal

SD 23 (Central Okanagan)

Member, BCPVPA Ad Hoc Anti-Racism Committee

Watson Road Elementary sits on the traditional and unceded territory of the Okanagan (Syilx) People.

Watson Road Elementary is a K-6 elementary school with 630 students. Our journey to becoming an anti-racist community of learners began two years ago, with an incident of racism in the form of a racial slur directed at a student of colour. Following this incident, a call to action was made to our staff; I shared the story of this occurrence, and invited them to be a part of an Equity Team which would engage in learning opportunities, and strategize about how we could meet the needs of our racialized and marginalized students and families. Ten members of staff were excited to join the team and, this past year, we grew by three additional members. We are represented by classroom teachers, our ELL teacher, Indigenous Advocate, an Education Assistant, and Administration. Our work rests on the pillars of education, parent, and community involvement, and building staff and student awareness and capacity.

Our Equity Team's first meeting was to establish our vision and purpose, and to discuss what was happening in our school community, with the awareness that this was not an isolated incident. It was made clear that we wanted to engage in targeted learning so that we could effectively respond to incidents of racism and discrimination, while

Courtesy David Johnson



The Equity Team
Watson Road Elementary, SD 23

BCPVPA Principals - November 2023

also educating our broader school community about inclusion and how to become informed, anti-racist citizens. Our first learning opportunity came through the BCPVPA's webinar series, Leading for Equity. Each of the four webinars gave us an opportunity to learn from provincial leaders while discussing the learning and how to apply it to our context. We also participated in the BCPVPA webinar series, Unconscious Bias, as well as engaging in equity, diversity, inclusion training with our district's EDI Lead Teacher. Our team connects each month to check in about our community and the implementation of our action plan. We also make it a priority to engage all staff during monthly staff meetings, where we share what we have learned and facilitate staff learning activities around equity and anti-racism. This year, our Equity Team will facilitate more staff learning during a dedicated district Implementation Day, continue to devote time for learning at staff meetings, and invite staff to participate in a book study on inclusion and anti-racism.

A critical component of our work has been the involvement of our parent community, more specifically, the parents of our students who have been impacted by racism, discrimination, micro-aggressions, or other forms of exclusion. We know that unless we understand their stories, our work will never gain the traction it needs to be effective. Our responsiveness to incidents where our racialized or marginalized students are negatively impacted is crucial to building relationships of trust with our parent community. Early on, as we continued to have conversations with these parents, it was evident that they could contribute directly to our work. An invitation to participate in a parent roundtable discussion was extended to specific BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Color) and LGBTQ2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Two-Spirit) parents so they could share their experiences and those of their child with our team. Parents were sent some guiding questions to prepare for the roundtable. To say that this event was powerful would be a significant understatement: it has helped shape our work. Our school's PAC president also

participates in our Equity Team's learning and work while representing our broader parent community.

The most important impact of our work comes from building the capacity of our students to understand what it means to be anti-racist, and how to act on this understanding. We learned through conversations with students that there was a lack of awareness as to what constitutes a micro-aggression; why this indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination is hurtful; and, that much of their behaviour is being learned through social media and peer interaction. This past year, we began presenting 45-minute lessons to our grade six classes on the history of racism, what micro-aggressions look like, and how to respond to situations where other students are being impacted by racial slurs, micro-aggressions, or hurtful behaviour based on their skin colour or how they identify. These presentations will continue in every classroom in 2023/2024 so that this targeted learning reaches each student at Watson Road Elementary.

Some other actions we are embedding in our school's culture include having students read their personalized land acknowledgments on our daily announcements; identifying a Multicultural Calendar event each day on our daily announcements; and including specific anti-racist language in our Code of Conduct. Each school newsletter communicates our work on anti-racism so that our parent community understands the importance of this work, and can continue the conversation with their children at home.

A single incident led to a series of events that has culminated in a collaborative effort by staff to ensure that students who are racialized or marginalized can be heard, and feel welcome, safe, and part of the broader community. Although we still experience incidents fueled by racism, these incidents are less and less frequent and we are making marked progress in how staff and students respond.

This important work is heavy work, and we are ready to lift to make a difference for our community of learners.