

Dear Charter Oak Families:

Last week and under the leadership of our parents, we started an important dialogue on implicit bias and its implications for education. Gloria Mengual, the Coordinator for Diversity and Inclusion for CREC's Open Choice Program presented to our community on the topic. Ms. Mengual provided a definition of implicit racial bias, stressed the fact that most people are not aware of their own biases, and encouraged all of us to have to continue this conversation. When present, implicit bias has important negative consequences including lower teacher expectation, segregation or disproportionate discipline.

My sincere gratitude to our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which is a newly formed group of parents and staff in our school that is interested in talking about issues around equality and diversity "in order to improve our school community and climate." The group is asking for your input and ideas as we identify goals for the Committee and the School. Please consider attending the next meeting which is on January 28th at 6:30 in the Family Resource Center.

The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee is one of the several efforts our school community is making to make sure that Charter Oak is the school we all envision for every single member of our extended family. Our school has also joined the district's work on the West Hartford Welcoming Schools Initiative, which is already under way, and will assess, following a protocol, how welcoming each school is as a first step to develop an Action Plan in this area. In addition, at Charter Oak we have identified an area of special attention on equity. This year we will be collecting data, that will be reported to our families, on how equitable our enrichment opportunities are for our students. Another area of attention is gender. Our staff has started a conversation on this topic and is receiving training, which started with a presentation we recently had offered by Robin McHaelen from TrueColors, a leading organization in this area. Robin will be presenting to our parents in May, so please stay tuned.

Finally, our teachers are working hard to bring more diverse material to their classrooms and their practices. Just last week our staff dedicated their professional development time to Cultural Responsiveness, focusing on the use of diverse teaching materials. During our work, we looked at the recently added diverse texts to our curriculum at the district level, we gained a better understanding of ways to look at teaching materials through the lens of equity, we reflected on our existing collection, and we started a wish list of culturally relevant materials to bring to our school to put in the hands of our children.

We have been reminded these days the words of Rudine Sims Bishop, "Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange.... but a window can be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books."

Let's all make sure that our Charter Oak children have books in school that are both windows to the entire world and mirrors where they can see themselves.

Juan Melián  
Principal