



Magnificat High School Listening Sessions Summary

ABOUT THE LISTENING SESSIONS

Magnificat High School engaged Equius Group, LLC to conduct listening sessions with faculty, staff, students, parents, alumnae, and friends following a racist social media incident involving several students that occurred in January of 2020 and became widely known in May, 2020.

Magnificat embarked upon this process in an effort to address the concerns of the community and to better understand the current state as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion. In addition to conducting the listening sessions, Magnificat leadership has committed to forming an Anti-Racism Advisory Taskforce.

In total, **170 members of the Magnificat community engaged in the listening sessions** (15 parents; 15 students; 45 faculty/staff members; 20 Board and Leadership Team members; 75 alumnae and friends).

The following themes emerged from the different constituent listening session conversations and were compiled by Erica Merritt of Equius Group.

CONTENTS

- Students.....2
- Faculty/Staff.....3
- Board of Directors/Leadership Team.....4
- Parents.....5
- Alumnae & Friends.....6
- Conclusion & Recommendations.....7

STUDENT RESPONSE

Racist Video and School Response

- Students consistently agreed that the video was racist, hurtful and should not have happened.
- Students varied widely in their opinion of how the racist incident was handled by the school, with some believing it had been handled well and others believing the incident was not handled well.

Racial Dynamics

- There is a lack of cross-racial interaction between students inside and outside of school. There are no faculty of color for students of color to connect with and seek support. This also leads to no opportunity to disrupt narratives around race and status for white students.
- A common perception among some of the students was that many white students respond to Black History month activities and the Equity Summit with disinterest and resistance.

Advancing Racial Equality

- Students expressed wanting to see more faculty, staff, and counselors of color. There was a desire for more authors of color to be featured in the curriculum and not just relegated to particular classes or months of the year.
- Students also cited the need to educate teachers so they are prepared to teach students of color more effectively and to teach in ways that do not reinforce racial stereotypes or harm students.
- The narrative around Black people needs to change and be told in the context of resilience and not just oppression.
- Students who have experienced the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum found it to be informative and valuable. Students described feeling they were receiving a quality education and that they were treated well for the most part.

Relationships

- BIPOC students described often being the only student of color in their classes and sometimes feeling like they do not belong.
- BIPOC students shared experiences of being treated as spokespeople for their respective racial groups or being singled out by teachers on topics related to Black people or other People of Color in class.
- BIPOC students also described the difficulty of breaking into friend groups that had formed in elementary school since many of the white students have been going to school together since kindergarten.
- White students described not seeing many students of color in their classes and noticing that friend groups seemed to be racially segregated.
- Students described getting along with people of other groups but not having deep relationships across difference.

FACULTY/STAFF RESPONSE

Racist Video and School Response

- Several faculty/staff expressed anger, sadness, and shame. They seemed to personalize the racist video incident. They felt it was out of alignment with Magnificat's values and that the students should have known better.
- The word embarrassed was mentioned several times. Faculty and staff hold a high degree of pride in working for or teaching at Magnificat and this incident diminished that pride for some.
- A few faculty/staff expressed feeling kept in the dark because they were not told about the incident prior to May. A few expressed concerns that their Black students may have felt betrayed.
- There was disappointment around the initial statement from Magnificat, the faculty and staff thought it seemed to be more focused on social media conduct than the racism itself.
- There was a wide array of perspectives around the way the students were disciplined. Some thought it was handled appropriately, others thought that the discipline was not harsh enough.

Racial Dynamics

- There is a lot of work to do. Some faculty and staff expressed concern that the white students were centered in the racist video incident and not enough attention was paid to the Black students who were harmed.
- Faculty talked about a need to hold each other accountable around behaviors and curriculum. "We need to call each other in."

Advancing Racial Equity

- There is a need to increase the number of faculty of color and students of color while changing the culture so that they will stay. There were mentions of staff who have not stayed because of their experiences.
- There needs to be more education of parents around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- We need to do more to center BIPOC students.
- There is a need to disaggregate data around race including enrollment, retention, discipline, Honors/AP courses and leadership opportunities.
- The curriculum must be addressed, white students and students of color need to understand power, privilege, and oppression. It needs to start earlier and not be limited to a single course.
- Faculty, staff, and students need to learn how to have difficult conversations in a constructive manner. This needs to go beyond professional development or a specific class and become a consistent part of the culture.
- Some faculty and staff expressed pride that Magnificat was taking the time to hold listening sessions with its constituents.
- Magnificat is growing as a community and there are more conversations about whiteness and privilege than there were in the past.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS/LEADERSHIP TEAM RESPONSE

Racist Video and School Response

- Most expressed sadness and disappointment in response to the video. Some expressed concern for the student in the video while others expressed concern for all Magnificat students especially those who are Black.

Racial Dynamics

- There is a need to increase diversity of the faculty, staff, students, and board.
- The board needs to learn more about diversity, equity, and inclusion, especially how they might recruit people of color.
- Racism exists at Magnificat because it is a part of larger society and racism exists in society.

Advancing Racial Equity

- Magnificat needs to clarify and communicate its why for racial justice, equity, and inclusion.
- This is an opportunity to support students of color and make sure they feel welcome.

Relationships

- White students need to learn how they can be better allies to students of color. The Facing History concept of being an upstander may be a place to begin.
- More could be done to ensure that parents of color also feel welcome.

PARENT RESPONSE

Racist Video and School Response

- All of the parents who saw the video were upset by the content and disappointed that these kinds of things are still happening.

Racial Dynamics

- Parents of students of color shared that their daughters are sometimes tokenized by teachers and asked to speak on behalf of their identity group or when “Black” things are discussed in school.
- A few of the parents were also alumnae and recounted stories of racism that they witnessed during their time at Magnificat. For that reason, they were not surprised by the recent incident because it aligned with what they had seen during their time.
- Racism on the west side of Cleveland is strong so there is not much surprise that there are racial issues in the school, too.

Advancing Racial Equity

- Magnificat needs to increase the diversity of their faculty and staff. There needs to be more diversity on the board of directors. Magnificat needs to cultivate relationships with alumnae of color and ask them to join the board.
- Magnificat should invest in building the capacity of current faculty to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- There should be more diversity in the curriculum. There should be more of a focus on the contributions that Black and other people of color have made to this country.
- Black students should be encouraged to explore Historically Black Colleges.

Relationships

- A couple parents talked about their daughters having strong relationships with girls of different backgrounds. While others discussed the challenge of connecting with other students outside of school because of distance and living in mostly white neighborhoods.
- A few parents of color described an awkwardness when interacting with other parents, being received coldly or not being acknowledged. In contrast others described being welcomed and invited to sit with other parents at games. There seemed to be a gender dynamic here.
- White students need to understand the difference between appreciation and appropriation.

ALUMNAE & FRIEND RESPONSE

Racist Video and School Response

- The vast majority of the alumnae were sad, disgusted, and angered by the video; however, they were not surprised that a Magnificat student did it. Their experience is that there is a culture of racism at the school – both explicit and implicit racism as well as one of entitlement and privilege. There was more surprise that something like this had not already happened.
- Several alumnae felt that the girls were using the word without realizing that they were not supposed to do so and/or without realizing the hurt and harm that it would cause. They hear the N-word in music and other popular culture. However, the majority of the alumnae felt that they girls knew exactly what they were doing and the impact that it would have. Their actions were deliberate and intentional.
- The video was a trigger for many of the alumnae. For some it was a reminder of the difficulty of their Magnificat experience with respect to racism, not being Catholic and other aspects of the “Us vs. Them” and “Have vs. Have Not”, mean girl culture. For others, the video, the social media responses and discussions with their peers have made them realize how unaware they were during their time at Mags but looking back could recall racist incidents that they did not, at the time, recognize them for what they were.
- Across the board, everyone expressed disappointment and anger with the first communication. The second communication was generally better received. This was very disappointing to the alumnae and several were embarrassed, for the first time, to be associated with Magnificat.

Racial Dynamics/Advancing Racial Equity

- Provide more direct support for students of color to help them navigate the obstacles and who understand their experiences in a predominantly white institution.
- Need to increase the diversity of students, faculty, staff, leadership, and the board.
- Overhaul the curriculum, racial equity and diversity need to be woven into every subject and not just offer a Black history class.
- In addition to changes in curriculum, there needs to be training specific to diversity, racism, privilege, white supremacy, LGBTQ, intersectionality and cultural sensitivity and this training needs to be mandatory for all students and not optional. This training needs to be extended across the community – to parents and alumnae.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop and implement a comprehensive recruitment strategy for increasing the number of faculty and staff of color. Prioritize equity competency in all hiring.
- Develop a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy for increasing and maintaining students of color.
- Capitalize on current process of updating the curriculum to increase the focus on authors of color, decolonizing history, and increasing the offerings of classes and content that expose students at all grade levels to issues of social justice.
- Integrate diversity, equity and inclusion into professional development on an ongoing basis.
- Find additional ways to engage parents around issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice.
- Develop a communications strategy and process for handling incidents like the racist video.
- Create additional opportunities to gain input from students around their experience.
- Disaggregate discipline, enrollment, disenrollment, academic placement, and other data by race to uncover and address inequities.
- Review the student handbook and employee handbook through an equity lens and make changes accordingly.

CONCLUSION

The Listening Sessions focused on reaction and response to the widely shared video created by a Magnificat student, of a Magnificat student, using a racial slur. The video was shared widely at the beginning of a summer marked by an outpouring of protests across the country, and the world, calling for an end to the systems and structures that perpetuate the injustice of racism in all of its manifestations across the generations.

We are grateful to all who participated in the Listening Sessions. We recognize and embrace the opportunities for growth and healing that reside in the aftermath of the incident, amidst the pain, frustration, and disappointment caused by the video.

In alignment with our school Mission, with humility, and in the spirit of Mary's Magnificat, we affirm and renew our commitment to the work of equity, inclusion, and racial justice within our school community and the larger world.

As part of that ongoing work, an Anti-Racism Advisory Task Force is being formed, and will begin its work in January of 2021. The search for the new Senior Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is underway.