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**Analyze and describe the extent to which the district calendar, handbook, and policy book affirms a commitment to cultural diversity.**

Any company, business, or school district can teach, preach, and promote cultural diversity. However, as with most things in life, if there is a gap between what is said and what is done, the only lesson learned is that cultural diversity is important somewhere, but not necessarily “here”. In order to be real, these lessons need to be taught not only in the classrooms, but also be visible in the buildings, classrooms, and faculty lounges, on the district’s calendar, and in all district publications. Students and adults alike need to see that cultural diversity is more than a unit in a history or social issues class, but rather a part of their everyday world.

For this assignment I gathered the following Sachem District publications to look for evidence of, or references to Sachem District’s commitment to cultural diversity:

District Calendar

Guidance Handbook

Parent Guidebook

Student Agenda Book

2014-2015 Profile

2014-2015 Teacher Policy Handbook

### **District Calendar:**

To save money on postage, Sachem began making the school calendar available for download from the district website. There is only one version available and it is written exclusively in English.

The front cover of the district Calendar sports three pictures taken at various Board of Education meetings from the year before. There seem to have been approximately 60 students among the three pictures. Although I couldn't find any reference to what three groups of students were being honored by the BOE in these pictures, it was obvious that one was a sport group or team, and the other two were academic. In looking closely, there didn't seem to be any students of color on the sports team. Zooming in on the others may have shown two students in the other pictures who might have had darker skin than the others.

### **Guidance Handbook:**

The guidance handbook contains only course offerings, descriptions, and some clip art. Some of the clip art represent drawings of people with different shades of skin. Again, this publication is written in English and my guidance department was unaware of it being available in any other language. It was suggested to me that, if a student who spoke a language other than English might be able to get a translator at his/her guidance meeting or that perhaps there might be one in Spanish at district office.

### **Patent Guidebook**

This guidebook was a simple outline of the high school experience from transitioning in through graduation requirements and college. Again, it was available in English only. The guidebook explained high school basics and the academic record, gave parents suggestions on how to support their student's education from home, and listed some basic career and educational options, college information, and information for parents of athletes. The book seemed to

assume that there would be a parent home when the student got home, and that parents should be able to involve their student in at least 3 sports or extracurricular activities. There is no mention of multicultural activities, supports for parents of non-achieving students, or for students whose parents both must work.

### **Student Agenda Book**

The very first page of the Sachem High School East Student Agenda h\showed a student of color holding a pile of books and smiling. The rest of the pages in the agenda have either clip art, line drawings of people with white skin and/or small pictures with a single word such as “Motivation”, “Resilience”, and Perseverance” with a quote above each one starting with “What Matters Most?” and some sort of nature picture below. The only quote that made reference to diversity was the quote for “Respect”. It said “What does it look like to respect differences? Try inclusion, acceptance, and encouragement.” The picture beneath is of a lion.

The only picture that actually showed a variety of skin colors was the picture for “Challenges” which showed just the legs and sneaker-clad feet of several kids who were running. The majority of the legs had brown skin.

The rest of the book (aside from the actual planning pages) had suggestions for studying and academic reference materials such as periodic tables.

### **2014-2015 Profile**

This pamphlet is produced out of the guidance department and is meant to give parents an overview of the district. A guidance secretary said that she believe it was given to parents of new students and incoming freshmen. On the front page, along with lists of the guidance counselors from both schools and a list of district office administrators, contains a blurb describing Sachem District. It is advertized as a “working-class community, located in the

geographic center of Long island, New York, 60 miles east of New York City and 85 miles west of Montauk Point.”

The profile goes on to describe the number of students in the district followed by a breakdown of the number of students at each level. No mention is made of sub-groups such as race, religion, ethnicity, or gender.

At the end of the 3rd page, there is the generic statement assuring the reader that Sachem does not discriminate. This is the only reference made to diversity in the pamphlet.

### **2014-2015 Teacher Policy Book**

Once again, this publication is available in English only. It contains the rules and responsibilities for teachers from attendance or duties. I was unable to find any reference to cultural diversity in the packet.

### **Conclusion**

As a life-long Sachem resident, alumni, and employee, I would not have said that Sachem District does not value and encourage diversity. Growing up, I had friends in school who were non-white. In fact, there were so few of them that even at 56 years old, I still remember each one. This is not specifically because they weren't white, but because their non-whiteness held them apart in my memory from the hundreds of other peers who looked so similar that they blurred together over the years.

In addition, each school puts a lot of time and energy into hosting a multicultural day in which students are encouraged to bring in their culture to share through food, costumes, dance, and custom. Teachers are welcome to bring their classes to the auditorium for the show that one day.

The questions I have now are:

Is Sachem not as culturally diverse from plan, exclusion, or simply geography?

Can a school district help it when the economics of their neighborhoods are able to attract and/or sustain certain economic groups?

How does a district go about naturally "attracting" diversity?