

## SUBURBAN RACIAL DISPARITIES

### Here's how your school district is responding

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*Editor's note: This story accompanies a larger package about the disparities faced by students of color, particularly black students, across Monroe County's suburban school districts. This series references 2015-16 U.S. Education Department Civil Rights Data Collection figures, which were provided to each district with a request for comment. The following responses have been edited and condensed for clarity.*

#### Brighton

The district has hired the Rev. Marlowe Washington as its diversity consultant and leader of its Diversity and Equity Committee. The entire staff has been through implicit bias training and “continued to engage in a variety of specific professional and curricular development initiatives around topics related to diversity, equity, inclusivity, and cultural responsiveness,” district spokesman Dan Goldman wrote in an email.

Brighton also reported having taken concrete steps in the areas of discipline and access to higher-level coursework but did not specify what those steps were.

#### Brockport

The district has partnered with the College at Brockport to create a “diversity certification program (that) provides faculty and staff the opportunity to engage in programs and activities that promote the discussion and awareness of diversity and inclusive excellence,” district spokeswoman Kerry Sharp wrote in an email. That program will include cultural subject area training sessions in an effort to “increase the ‘cultural intelligence’ of faculty and staff with respect to identified cultural groups” and highlight shared interests and cultural norms. Enrollees will be required to complete a 10-hour externship with “an approved culturally focused community/ corporate organization.”

#### Churchville-Chili

#### Penfield

Administrators at Penfield High School are receiving education in restorative justice this year and hope to fully implement the practice within three years. The district regularly holds professional development on topics surrounding race, including trauma-informed education this year.

Penfield's honors and advanced track courses are open to all students without prerequisite, and guidance counselors “routinely encourage students to reach their full potential by registering for higher level courses,” district spokesman Nancy Bradstreet wrote in an email. It has created a credit-bearing class out of its extracurricular Mosaic Club.

#### Pittsford

The district recently created an Inclusivity Advisory committee whose first charge is “reviewing and analyzing data about school climate and a wide range of student subsets.” More broadly it will examine various structures and policies in the district and how they affect minority students, among others.

Pittsford has offered a number of professional development opportunities around race and equity to teachers and staff, including several presentations from outside organizations. It is also conducting a review of its library collection and curriculum to ensure the presence of “books that are either authored by, or feature a protagonist who is female or a member of any other nondominant culture.”

#### Rush-Henrietta

The district reviewed its own internal data to show that disparities in discipline and access to higher-level courses have narrowed over the last several years. It cited initiatives like the adoption of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, a framework intended, among other things, to ward off misbehavior before it happens.

Rush-Henrietta is moving to institute restorative practices and has created written guidelines for suspensions to ensure students of color are not being targeted unfairly.

District spokeswoman Amanda Puleo wrote in an email: “Just purely looking at numbers without context that includes subgroup sizes, more intimate information about rigorous courses that are not exclusive to AP, and student discipline patterns, may lead to varying interpretations.” In particular, she pointed out that Churchville-Chili offers several other advanced coursework opportunities besides AP.

The district has a Dignity for All committee that has created more in-school support for students, including an onsite out-of-school suspension room. It participates in restorative practices and provides teacher training around equity and related topics. Churchville-Chili has increased its efforts to ensure all high school students take at least one higherlevel course, Puleo wrote.

### **East Irondequoit**

The district noted that it pays the exam fees for AP and IB courses and has a program in place to encourage first-generation college students, including through a trip to historically black colleges and universities.

East Irondequoit has recently begun exploring restorative practices as well as trauma-informed education and has “dedicated a significant amount of time over the years learning how to be culturally competent,” spokesman Dave Yates wrote in an email.

Yates also noted East Irondequoit is the most diverse district in Monroe County; indeed, it is the only district where white, black and Hispanic students all make up more than 20 percent of the student body.

### **Fairport**

The district participates in the national Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) Project, with about 200 educators having been through “professional seminars to examine their own equity and social justice practices,” district spokeswoman Jen Merkel wrote in an email. There is a dedicated school psychologist supporting that effort.

Top-level administrators “attended a conference on culturally and linguistically responsive educational practices in order to guide programmatic, curricular and instructional decision-making.” Fairport students did an exchange with Early College International High School in Rochester in 2016 and have formed an extracurricular club devoted to racial equity.

### **Gates Chili**

“Staff who interact with students are expected to use disciplinary action only when necessary and to place emphasis on the student’s ability to grow and develop as citizens,” the district wrote in a detailed response to this data posted on its website. It has also increased the number of AP classes without prerequisites for enrollment.

### **Spencerport**

Assistant Superintendent for Instruction Ty Zinkiewich said the district has invested “a tremendous amount of energy and resources” into suspending fewer students, lessening racial disparities in discipline rates and in reintegrating students back into the classroom once they’ve been suspended. The district has begun to use restorative practices, including peace circles, he said. It has seen an overall increase in participation in AP courses over the last five years. Steve Lysenko, an assistant principal at Spencerport High School, is the president of the National Association for Multicultural Education, which is intended to create “safe spaces where white, black (and) latino educators of all races and ethnicities can come together and have similar conversations around race and how it impacts us.”

### **Webster**

Webster is one of the founding districts in the state chapter of the National Association for Multicultural Education and is working with the Empire Justice Center to create an affinity group for families of color. The district “continually works on a systematic approach to engage all students in higher level course offerings, including AP classes,” spokeswoman Krista Grose wrote in an email, and uses restorative justice practices.

In terms of staff development, the district is working with several outside entities, including the Equity Learning Institute and local colleges, on reading culturally responsive texts, creating culturally responsive curriculum and “exploring personal biases as educators.”

### **West Irondequoit**

The district has made it a goal to have all students take advanced courses including AP and has removed some prerequisite obstacles. West Irondequoit originated the Roc 2 Change program and hosted the first summit in 2015. A Pathways to Teaching program is open to all students, but the district hopes that minority students in particular will take part to help increase the supply of teachers of color in the future.

Superintendent Kimberle Ward, before her unexplained departure from the district, said she had “real concerns” regarding the validity of the data but acknowledged that disparities do exist.

Gates Chili recently revised its code of conduct “to open up opportunities for students to earn their way back” after being disciplined, she said. The district is “exploring culturally relevant teaching” and had its top administrators go through a three-hour training on restorative justice and peace circles, among other similar commitments. It has also worked with the New York University Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality (TAC-D).

“When we survey our students, they are grateful for the diversity, and share that we just get along, we have been with each other through elementary school,” she wrote. “It is the adults that we are focusing on.”

### Greece

Equity is listed as an area of focus in the district’s Envision Greece 2022 strategic plan. The district has worked with TAC-D and created a districtwide “equity design team” overseeing all aspects of equity work, including professional development and training.

The district now allows any students to take Advanced Placement or other high-level courses without prerequisites and has a committee tasked with reviewing curriculum “through the lens of equity,” district spokeswoman Laurel Heiden wrote in an email. Discipline, attendance and achievement data is reviewed monthly for disparities. Greece created additional ways for low-income and first-generation students to reach college, including dual credit programs and other partnerships with local colleges. A new course at the high school level “includes student-driven explorations into issues such as immigration, racism and gender equality.”

### Hilton

Hilton High School is rolling out a school-based alternatives to suspension program this month that is offered by Center for Youth. Rather than being sent home on suspensions, students stay in a classroom with a social learning specialist and teacher or teacher’s aide where they can complete their regular school work while also learning “life skills and positive coping mechanisms,” district spokeswoman Grace Scism wrote in an email. The district is also creating a Families of Color group, envisioned as “a strong collective of parents, concerned family members and

West Irondequoit has also instituted professional development for staff around cultural competency and has adopted restorative justice practices. Many administrators and school board members read Ta’Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me* as part of a book club, and the book is available for free to all staff.

### Wheatland-Chili

The district recently did a review of its academic support and disciplinary procedures and “established clear protocols, practices, and progress monitoring to ensure all students are supported toward success,” Superintendent Deborah Leh wrote in an email.

At the same time, it “recalibrated” its code of conduct “focus on promotion and prevention strategies as a universal strategy for all students.” That includes using restorative practices and providing equal access to support systems, Leh said.

*In addition to the steps listed above, many districts mentioned that they participate in the Urban-Suburban program; have sent students to Roc2Change events or hosted them; and held community viewings and discussions of the film “I’m Not Racist ... Am I?”. Many also have diversity-focused extracurricular groups for students, often called Mosaic Club.*

*East Rochester, Honeoye Falls-Lima and Victor did not respond to the Democrat & Chronicle’s request for comment.*

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Arcadia seniors Kidest Yigezu, left, and Kidane Malik stand outside their school.

**Arcadia seniors Kidest Yigezu, left, and Kidane Malik stand outside their school. KETSIA**

allies passionate about building a racially and economically just community for children.”

RODRIGUEZ

Hilton was one of the first districts in New York to adopt IB curriculum universally, and all students take at least some of those courses in middle school and high school.