



# Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

**CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING THROUGH  
DIGNITY AND RESPECT**

**VERONA PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
DECEMBER 7, 2021**

*Dr. Lydia E. Furnari  
Interim Superintendent*

# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

## DIVERSITY



of people and perspectives

## EQUITY



in policy and practice

## INCLUSION



of all voices and visions



# Verona Public Schools

## Strategic Plan 2018-2023

- ▶ **Strategy 2: Uphold a healthy and respectful school culture consistent with our core values.**
  - ▶ **Result #2: Integrate experiences that value diversity, promote cultural understanding and consider multiple perspectives.**



# Core Values

The District's Strategic Plan identifies the following as our core values

- ▶ Integrity
- ▶ Accountability
- ▶ Respect
- ▶ Teamwork
- ▶ Creativity
- ▶ Resilience
- ▶ Passion
- ▶ Wellness



# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee

- ▶ The District began working on matters of diversity, equity & inclusion as part of the current strategic plan.
- ▶ The Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee was formed and began discussions that led to the implementation of a number of initiatives.
- ▶ In response to feedback from students, and other members of the school community, the DEI Committee recommended that the District seek the assistance of an outside expert in the field to assist with this important work.



# What Have We Accomplished?

- ▶ Broadened our curricular offerings and educational experiences to ensure multiple perspectives
- ▶ Offer dual enrollment university courses to VHS students on Race, Culture & Identity, as well as multicultural topics
- ▶ Populated all school libraries with diverse resources such as books about diversity, equity & inclusion as well as books by authors like Jaqueline Woodson, Monica Clark-Robinson, and Kwame Alexander
- ▶ Formed the Verona Public Schools Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Committee
- ▶ Staff members from each school building as well as community members met over the course of several meetings in spring 2021 to begin a conversation about diversity, equity, and inclusion in our school community.
- ▶ Instituted Staff and Administrator Book Clubs:
  - ▶ How to be an Anti-Racist by X. Kendi and
  - ▶ Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice that Shapes What We See, Think, and Do by Jennifer Eberhardt
- ▶ Joined the Kean University Diversity Council
- ▶ Conducted searches for a consultant to help us to identify next steps that fit the needs of the Verona Public Schools
- ▶ Subscribed to NEMNET: a National Diversity Recruitment and Consulting firm
- ▶ Staff Professional Development by partnering with Learning for Justice in the program Facilitating Critical Conversations.



# Areas for Future Work

The DEI Committee initially identified several areas of focus for this work:

- ▶ Professional Development & Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- ▶ Educational Equity & School Climate and Culture
- ▶ Community Outreach & Hiring / Recruiting



# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

- ▶ Important questions we ask ourselves:
  - ▶ What does an environment that is diverse, equitable and inclusive look like...sound like...feel like?
  - ▶ What are we doing right now that makes people feel left out, left behind, not seen or not heard?
  - ▶ How far are we from where we are, to where we want and need to be?
  - ▶ What is our goal and how do we reach it?





# Our Overarching Goal for DEI

The Verona Public Schools' goal for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion is to match our structure, procedures and actions with our purpose, vision, and core values, to create an environment of belonging for all students and for our entire school community.



# We Will...

- ▶ We will reflect on our current practices in order to make necessary change so that all members of our school community feel valued.
- ▶ We will identify organization(s) with whom we will partner to help us to ensure that our work is truly focused on achieving the things we say are important to us.
- ▶ We will strive to listen, understand, collaborate, and grow thereby building trustful, respectful relationships.
- ▶ We will work as part of a consortia in discovering research-based strategies that help us to continue to grow into a place where diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging are evident in all we do.
- ▶ We will understand that this work is not easy and that it will take time to become part of the fabric of who we are.



# Next Steps - NJCEE

- ▶ Join the New Jersey Consortia for Excellence & Equity: led by the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education (UPENN GSE) and the New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA)
  - ▶ 2021-2022 Workshops include:
    - ▶ *Constructing the Innocent Classroom; Dismantling Racial Bias for our Children of Color*
    - ▶ *Creating Democratic Classrooms, Engaging Student Voice and Taking Informed Action*
    - ▶ *Wonder Words; Using the Power of Language to Help Students Learn & Thrive*



# Next Steps - Request for Proposal

- ▶ **Create a Request for Proposal to identify experienced experts in the field to guide our next steps with regard to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion using the following deliverables:**
  - ▶ External consultant(s) will work collaboratively with the Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) committee, including administration and staff members
  - ▶ External consultant(s) will meet with the Superintendent of Schools, Diversity Coordinator and Diversity Facilitators to discuss what the district has accomplished to date in terms of school culture and climate as well as hiring, recruiting, and retainment of staff.
  - ▶ External consultant(s) will review (1) school culture & climate and (2) hiring, recruiting, and retainment of staff, outlining methods such as conducting interviews, focus groups, and surveys, with a variety of stakeholders.



# Consultant: Deliverables (continued)

- ▶ The external consultant(s) will submit an evaluation report with specific feedback for (1) school culture & climate and (2) hiring, recruiting, and retainment of staff, including recommendations that will provide a better understanding and clear vision of the present district environment.
- ▶ External consultant(s) will engage in ongoing, consistent communication with the DEI committee and the Superintendent of Schools to ensure smooth implementation of the work plan.
- ▶ The external consultant will meet with the DEI committee and Superintendent of Schools throughout the project to share feedback and recommendations.
- ▶ Formal presentations of results will be shared at a Board of Education meeting to be determined by the DEI committee, Superintendent of Schools, and the Board of Education.

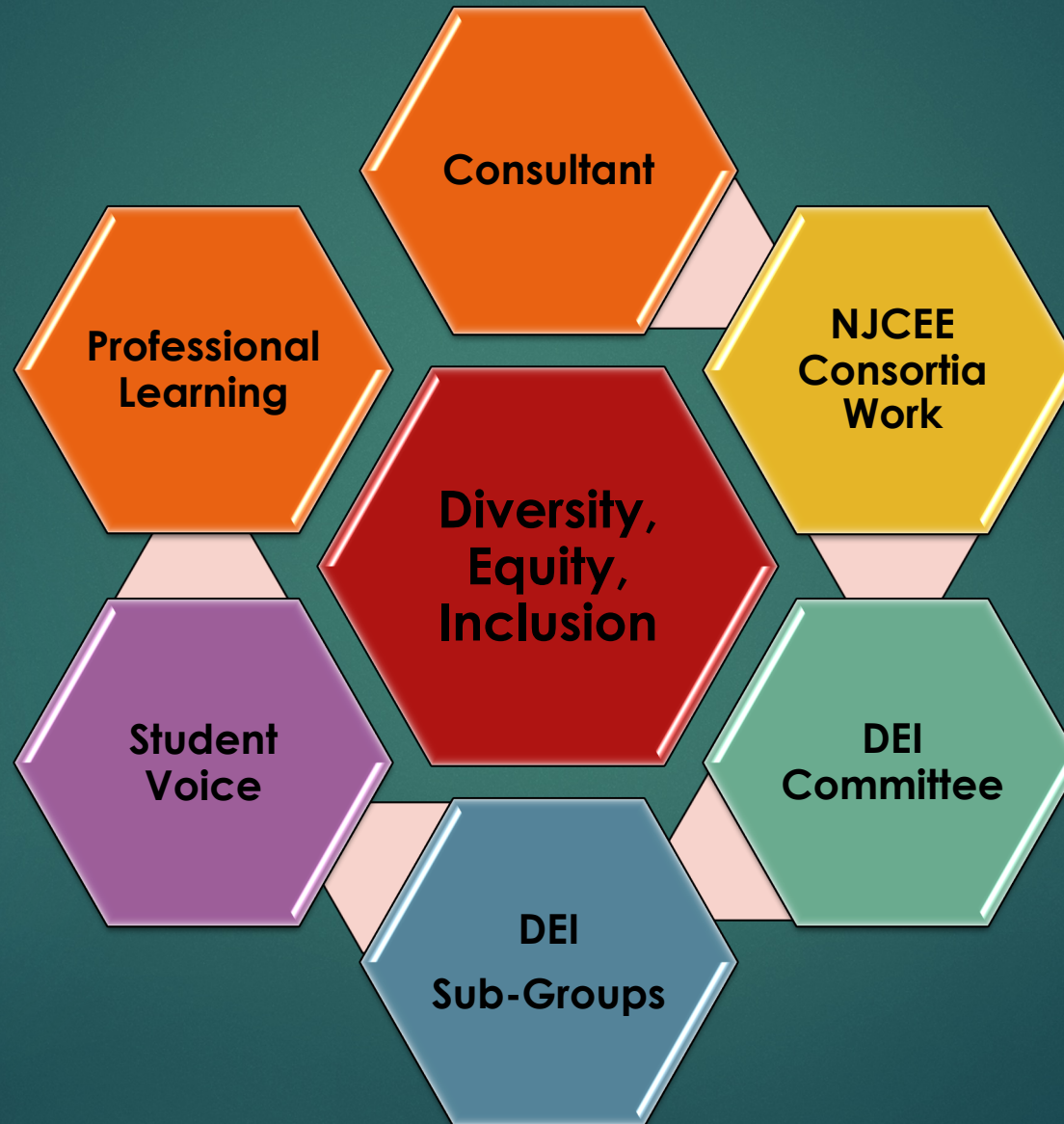


# Timeline

- ▶ Request for Proposal created - *December 2021*
- ▶ Join NJCEE Northeast – *December 2021*
- ▶ Identification of consultant – *February 2022*
- ▶ Attend workshops provided by NJCEE and turnkey information to District administrators and staff – *December 2021 – June 2022*
- ▶ Work with consultant on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion initiatives such as data gathering, analysis, making improvements to programs and processes. – *February – June 2022 and into the future*



# Multifaceted Approach





# Thank You for Your Partnership



*“Diversity is about all of us, and about us  
having to figure out how to walk through this  
world together.”*

-Jacqueline Woodson



# Contact Us

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**Thank you!**