

Diversity Paper

Camryn Ridpath

Longwood University

SOWK 492

Professor Reynolds

March 19th, 2022

Issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion have existed within society for generations. Often considered a key player in the long-standing fight for equality is the American school system. The educational experiences of youth, specifically those who are marginalized on the basis of race, gender, orientation, ability, class, or other identities, have been impacted by discrimination for as long as the institution of schools has been in place (Losinski et al., 2019). Although diversity and the overall awareness of related issues within schools have improved with time, instances of racism, inequality, and discrimination have been steadily increasing in prevalence raising concern for the safety and mental wellbeing of all youth (Losinski et al., 2019).

Bear Creek Academy is an alternative therapeutic day school in Cumberland County, Virginia that serves students aged eleven to eighteen with learning and emotional disabilities (Bear Creek Academy, n.d.). The school currently serves twelve students. With the school being so small when compared to a traditional public school, it is important for the staff to be extra cognizant that significant issues of discrimination are not occurring and that practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion are integrated into the policies and curriculum. The following is a summary of policy 100-02 which overviews the school's nondiscrimination policy as it is written in the Bear Creek Academy Personnel Policy Manual:

Bear Creek Academy is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination with regard to race, color, gender, sexual orientation, age, national origin, marital or veteran status, physical or mental disability, status as a parent, or any classification protected by law. This attitude will prevail in all its policies concerning staff, students, educational programs and services, and individuals and entities with whom the school does business. Decisions

to admit a youth will be made on established admission criteria and the ability to provide the needed services. Decisions to hire an individual will be made on established criteria for the specific position and other accepted employee criteria and practices. (100-02)

The staff works hard to combat issues of discrimination and inequity through communication with students and other staff when issues arise, taking diversity and inclusion trainings, and consistently reviewing and adapting school rules or policies that may be discriminatory in nature.

There are a variety of forms or mechanisms in which clients may be oppressed or discriminated against including during the process of admission to the school, when being disciplined for adverse behaviors, when transitioning back to a traditional public school, or in casual micro-aggressions that can take place during daily interactions. Additionally, clients can experience discrimination from different approaches such as by staff, other students, or by the agency through biased or discriminatory policies and procedures. All can be discriminated against based on race, gender, ability level, financial status, appearance, or other identities. Staff can discriminate by being harsher on certain students when it comes to punishments, not giving all students access to the same education and experiences, or making unfair assumptions about a student based on discriminatory factors. Students can discriminate through microaggressions, not including or being friends with certain students based on discriminatory factors, or being disrespectful towards students who are different from them for any number of reasons. The agency can discriminate through the implementation of discriminatory policies and procedures, through the admissions process (inherently must discriminate against some students as there are restrictions regarding who can be admitted), or through the transition process back to public schools.

A social worker within Bear Creek Academy could strive to minimize discrimination and advocate for social and economic justice among students and staff through interventions on a variety of levels including micro, mezzo, and macro. On a micro level, the social worker could meet with individual students or staff who have presented issues in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Mezzo-level interventions would include school-wide or community-wide advocacy events that promote diversity (such as diversity and inclusion training for all the staff, Black History Month presentations for the entire school, guest speakers and field trips to places like the Moton Museum, group meetings with all the students and staff to discuss diversity issues as they come up, discussion or presentations to all of the staff during weekly staff meetings). Additionally, issues of diversity and discrimination can be challenged on a macro level through large-scale advocacy efforts (such as a letter-writing campaign to show support for a government policy that works to minimize discrimination within schools).

At Bear Creek Academy specifically, a social worker with concern for diversity, equity, and inclusion issues could make note of their specific concerns and bring them to the weekly staff meeting to be discussed as a group. If these concerns are ignored by the administration, the social worker could set up a meeting with the school's board of directors to present their concerns, and should further note that initial attempts to mediate these issues with staff were ignored. If the issues continue to be ignored by those in positions of power, and the social worker feels that the issues are significant and in need of repair, they could file a formal report with the Department of Education in hopes that they will listen and handle the situation appropriately.

In order for a social worker to advocate for change, it is important that the agency that they work for is willing and open to moving through the change process. If there is a significant

issue within the agency related to diversity, inclusion, and equity, the social worker should make the issue known to the agency administrators first, then once an appropriate plan or intervention is developed, the social worker should work collaboratively with administrators (and a staff member who specializes in diversity and inclusion if one exists within the agency) and the staff as a whole to discuss the issue or issues that have occurred, review the planned intervention, allow for staff to make suggestions or critiques of the intervention (as the staff within an agency can sometimes have a different perspective of the day to day experiences and may be able to come up with a more realistic or effective intervention). The plan should align with the agency's mission as well as relevant NASW values such as social justice, dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, integrity, service, and competence (NASW, 2017). Once an intervention has been fully developed, the plan should be implemented on an agency-wide basis. Upon implementing the intervention, the social worker and administrators should consistently evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and make note of any short or long-term changes that need to be made in order to improve the success of the intervention with the ultimate goal of minimizing issues related to diversity, inclusion, and equity within the agency.

References

Bear Creek Academy Personal Policy Manual 300 – 29 (2008)

Bear Creek Academy. Private Therapeutic Day School in Virginia - Bear Creek Academy. (n.d.).

Retrieved March 19, 2022, from <http://www.bearcreekacademy.org/>

Losinski, M., Ennis, R., Katsiyannis, A., & Rapa, L. J. (2019, May 17). *Schools as change agents in reducing bias and discrimination: Shaping behaviors and attitudes - journal of child and family studies*. SpringerLink. Retrieved March 19, 2022, from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10826-019-01452-2>

National Association of Social Workers. (2017). NASW code of ethics. [https://](https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English)

www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English