Diversity in Appomattox County Schools

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While completing an internship with Appomattox schools in Appomattox, Virginia, the lack of diversity that the county itself presents and the school system has been noticed. In Appomattox, it is 79% white and only 17.8% African American(US, Census, 2022). The population Appomattox County schools serve are students from ages pre-k to 12th grade. Within the schools, 65% are white, and 22% of students are African American across the school district.

There is also a lack of diversity in staff. The staff has been primarily white in almost every eligibility and IEP meeting. As well as, when there are diversion meetings, most of the time, all of the staff is white. This can make some families uncomfortable, as white people often find it hard to understand and recognize the experiences of other races and ethnicities that the county has among the students. Interestingly, however, the best neighborhood reports that Appomattox scores 71 out of 100 on the diversity scale. The city's center is the most diverse area within Appomattox's proper boundaries. The least diverse areas are located in the eastern parts of Appomattox.

Clients can be discriminated against or oppressed because of the lack of diversity in school staff and staff on the local CSA-FAPT team, where students are referred for services. Every member thus far has been white and coming from similar socio-economic backgrounds in every meeting. In Appomattox, CSA serves all children; however, according to CSA.gov, when looking at service placement type, more white males are referred to foster care services at 52.6% of males, while 28.1% of African American students are referred to foster care with other only being 8.8%(CSA.gov 2022) They can also be discriminated against when getting services within the school. Not having a diverse school counseling staff can also cause problems with students experiencing issues closely related to being different from most white students, especially if they are SPED.

Oppression and backlash have been apparent in Appomattox County high school and on the school buses. Back in 2011, there was an incident on the bus with a few students who were bullying and harassing another student who was African American and had a disability and was repeatedly called racial slurs and verbally as well as physically assaulted. This student was only 10 years old and dealt with this abuse for the duration of the bus ride and required treatment afterward for PTSD and trauma. The transportation was eventually sued for 8.3 million dollars. And while the family did not win the child neglect case, it is still a moment in history that Appomattox will never forget. Since then Appomattox school board has attempted to crack down on bullying, especially racially driven bullying. Both teens on the bus were found guilty of disorderly conduct and assault, and battery in 2011. At the time of the article, the mother was awaiting a trial date in her civil case against the Appomattox County School Board.

There is currently a student at Appomattox High School who is openly and overtly racist, he states that he is and makes it very clear. He has harassed a few students and caused many issues within the school system regarding discipline and deciding what to do about the student because his behavior is so blatantly obvious. The school has given him discipline, but the root of the issue is seemingly unable to be fully addressed because of the lack of knowledge of what to do in this situation. He has caused many verbal and physical altercations between himself and others.

According to Baylor University, in the context of social work, diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential to our mission to enhance human well-being and help meet all people’s basic needs — especially those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.

Identifying a person's complex and intersecting identities, such as race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, or disability, helps social workers understand how their experiences and defining influences affect their perceptions and responses to life. (Baylor Univerisity, 2023)

A social worker within this agency has promoted social justice for years as her personal goal for her Student Family Support Specialist role. She advocates for students by requesting more diverse staff to be hired by the director, such as currently promoting a new social worker coming in who is African American and singing her praises because she is competent, resourceful, worthy, and would seriously help the population of Appomattox schools as well as parents. The social worker can also help these students by providing resources to clinicians and workers of different backgrounds and similar stories to those needing services. FAPT also works hard to provide knowledge and resources for families of different backgrounds to educate them on what is available and what is not. Often this looks like a very honest conversation stating that the team may not fully understand the experiences they have but that the team tries its best to serve them effectively.

Social workers could also work hard to promote social justice by connecting with the community organizations and resources by attending meetings, training, and other informational sessions to get to know everyone and put a name to a face for connections. There is also anti-oppressive practice, the act of challenging inequalities. Through institutional and societal changes, AOP provides social workers with a framework to provide services while attempting to understand how social inequality and oppressive structures cause barriers and how to eradicate oppression and challenge power structures(Baylor University, 2023)

On the micro level, social workers can meet with individuals and families that are experiencing problems and give them the proper guidance and resources they need to succeed. As well as conducting small groups to identify the families' social, emotional, and physical needs, typically providing help to improve the individual's lives and help them feel more confident about self-advocating. On the mezzo level, the FAPT team is a great community resource for families who need services, transportation, and whatever else FAPT can assist with. Social Workers can make that referral and help with the entire referral process. On the macro level, social workers can promote social justice by lobbying to change a policy or law based on diversity and inclusion.

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