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IN LIFE

DIVERSITY DAY

Impact Report

June 2022

Prepared by:

Protect Diversity in FHSD
<https://www.protectdiversity.com/>



DIVERSITY DAY



Racial Diversity Awareness Day was a student-led initiative that began at Turpin High School in 2015. Its purpose is to promote empathy and racial reconciliation via guest speakers, dialogue and personal reflection.

The event traditionally took place as part of a regular school day, but attendance was optional. In addition, parents must opt in for their child to participate.

In 2022, the Forest Hills School District (FHSD) board, citing parent complaints* postponed, rescheduled and then permanently canceled Diversity Day. However, with the support of parents, community members and area churches, students held an off-site, after-school Diversity Day on May 18, with a limited guest speaker presentation that included an expert from the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center.

On June 22, 2022, the FHSD board rejected a motion to reinstate Diversity Day for 2023 and instead passed a new "culture of kindness" resolution that effectively censors curriculum and teacher training related to diversity, identity and inclusion as part of the movement to "Stop CRT".



TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

March 30 - Minutes before dismissal, an announcement over the PA at Turpin High School states that the Diversity Day event planned for the following morning will be postponed. The stated reason was procedural, to give parents more time to review the agenda. Parent volunteers had already delivered snacks for the event.

Week of April 18 (approx.) - The Turpin HS principal and teacher sponsor for Diversity Day meet with an upset member of the FHSD community about the content of the event and left with an understanding that their needs were addressed. Turpin principal David Spencer and Superintendent Scot Prebles approved the modified agenda and curriculum (1 video and a few questions were removed from an activity). No board member expressed opposition after being informed.

April 29 - Late Friday afternoon, FHSD central office sent a notice of a special board meeting for Sunday, May 1, the afternoon after Turpin High School's prom. Agenda items included the already rescheduled Diversity Day. Live streaming of the meeting was not provided.

May 2 - Over 100 students and parents protest before an executive session of the FHSD Board. Students chanted "Look at us!"

May 6 - FHSD central office sends an official cancellation notice for the 2022 Diversity Day. Students work to organize an off-site event with donated funds from the community via GoFundMe.

May 19 - Student leader Claire Mengel testifies before the U.S. House Oversight Committee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. The topic was censorship in the classroom.

June 21 - The FHSD community learns a last-minute resolution to ban "anti-racism" was added to the board's meeting agenda for the following day.

March 31 - The planned day for Diversity Day, to coincide with an irregular day on the schedule when 9th and 10th graders were in testing.

April 20 - Superintendent Scot Prebles proposed dates for a rescheduled Diversity Day at the regular board meeting. Modifications removing one video and a few questions from the "Step Up to the Line" activity.

April 25 - Diversity Day was rescheduled for May 18, with the new agenda and permission slip provided to parents. Due to increased interest, the cap was increased to 200 students.

May 1 - Citing capacity concerns, FHSD board members discuss Diversity Day and how to include Anderson High School in the event (AHS also in the district but did not have a Diversity Day.) However, the board eventually passed a motion to prevent the use of "tax-payer"-funded resources to state Diversity Day. This forbade using school time or facilities to plan, promote and host the event.

May 18 - More than 350 students from Turpin High School stage a walkout off of campus to a nearby private property to demand the district reinstate Diversity Day. More than 150 students at Anderson High School walk out in solidarity with their friends and teammates.

June 22 - During public commentary, more than 25 community members, including students, speak out to oppose the resolution and in support of Diversity Day. Only 1 speaker supported the resolution. During board discussion, the FHSD board votes 3-2 to pass the anti-racism "Culture of Kindness" resolution. They also rejected reinstating Diversity Day in a separate resolution 2-3.

On May 18, 2022, 150 students from Anderson and Turpin High Schools participated in an off-site, after-school Diversity Day after the Forest Hills School Board permanently canceled "Racial Diversity Awareness Day".

Had Diversity Day remained an in-school, parental and student opt-in activity, 175 students from Turpin—30 % of the junior and senior classes—would have participated. Moving the event led to after-school conflicts, like sports and part-time jobs.

At the conclusion of Diversity Day we asked students to share their feedback about what they experienced in an anonymous survey. A selection of the comments are provided below.

From what you've learned today, what do you think you will remember 1 year from now? 5 years from now?

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The importance of history and social issues on today's world.

In five years I will remember how impactful this was and how being educated and having group discussions can be very important, especially for kids who want to have their voices heard.



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This strengthened my views on needed change.

I will remember that we all have the ability and responsibility to change and improve society.

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The importance of these conversations and the education of social issues

because that is the only way we can learn and grow as a society. Definitely appreciate how open minded everyone was and the great dialogue we were able to have!

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I will remember it all.

I loved everything they talked about and how well they were set up for this even though it was a last minute student planned event. I will always remember how educational it was and how much it was inspiring to hear others opinions on the whole thing.

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Today I learned about how many students have their own stories of struggle, even though it might not seem like it at first.

Knowing that everyone around me has their own unique story, yet we all can still understand and respect each other is very important. Most importantly, I learned that there are people like me, who strive for knowledge, community, and acceptance of diversity in the forest hills school district, which gives me much more hope for our futures.

What are some challenges that others who are not like you may face?

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Many people face issues according to race that I do not.

I luck out being as light skinned as I am, and that I lack a name typical of my ethnicity, which shouldn't be something I have to be thankful for. If I were to have either of those things I would be much less likely to achieve greatness, because even getting a minimum wage job can be tough because of a name and race.

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Poverty, discrimination based on skin color, discrimination based on religion, spaces being non-accessible.

Racial discrimination, socioeconomic challenges, social challenges, etc. Access to quality primary and secondary education.

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Lack of access to a high quality education, safe neighborhoods, stable sources of food or housing.

They may face more hateful comments, hiring discrimination, or other notable trends that decrease their quality of life and self confidence over time.

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Other people who are unlike me might experience discrimination due to their skin color or ethnicity,

Some people might experience struggles with money, and others might experience family problems such as parents divorce or family arguments. I am a woman and I am bi-romantic, which means I have experienced sexism and homophobia throughout my life, however, I am very lucky to have not experienced any racism, money struggles, or family problems before, so seeing everyone talking about it today reminded me that empathy for others is very important, so that I can understand others better, and so they can understand me better, too.

What worked well from today? What would you change?

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The step forward step back activity really showed how privileged we are.

I really liked every part of it, the only thing I would change about it is to make it a bit longer, as our group had so much to discuss and not enough time to do so

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Is there any message you would like to share with the FH school board? If so, what?

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Listen to the voices of the student body and make the needed changes.

Students shared experiences with the Forest Hills district in our discussions today and what I learned from them was infuriating. This school district has never been as inclusive and welcoming as you like to pretend it is - the cancellation of Diversity Day was only the one that got people's attention. You need to do better, and you should have been doing better years and years ago.

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I want them to know that they aren't turning us into good adults and getting us ready for the future.

We're inevitably going to interact with different people of all types and the lack of perspective that they are giving us is devastating.

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Diversity is a fact, not opinion, and no one can avoid it.

We need to embrace it in order to create a better world where everyone gets what they need to have good opportunities

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I would say that "we are not going to stop.

We, as students and members of our community, have the responsibility and the means to make change, and we will. We will not stop until there are equal right and opportunities for all, regardless of race or gender".

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As members of the school board, you have a responsibility to support EVERY student in the district, as well as to prepare them for the "real world", one that is increasingly diverse.

Diversity Day gives students the context needed to make decisions in this increasingly diverse world.

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