

Serious Talks and the LPS DEI Curriculum

History, Current Context, and Next Steps



LEXINGTON
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Care for Yourself & Others

This work is a substantial professional endeavor that has resulted from the efforts of countless educators for more than a decade. At the same time, this work is incredibly personal, for our staff, for our students, and our community. We must practice empathy and compassion, as we seek the best outcomes for our students.

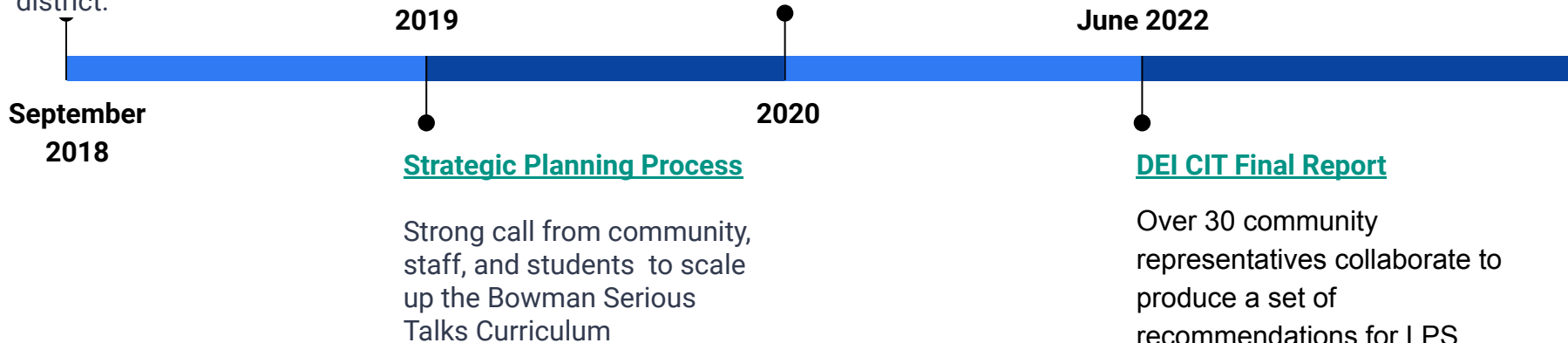


Agenda

1. Why this work?
 - a. Brief timeline
 - b. For elementary students, and for LPS students
2. DEI Curriculum in LPS
 - a. What is Serious Talks?
3. Developing the Districtwide PK-12 DEI Curriculum
4. Next Steps for DEI work in Elementary Schools

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Our Call to Action

Action Step 7: Educate all Students to be Inclusive, Racially Literate, and Culturally Proficient. [Existing programs] and others will be reviewed with an eye to possible extension and expansion for wider use in the district.



Why have a DEI Curriculum in Elementary Schools?

Why have a DEI curriculum in elementary school?

“We believe students need common language to better discuss issues, think critically, developing an understanding of the world they live in. Doing so, they gain practice with having challenging conversations, empowering them to have meaningful dialogue about any issue they encounter as they make sense of the world.

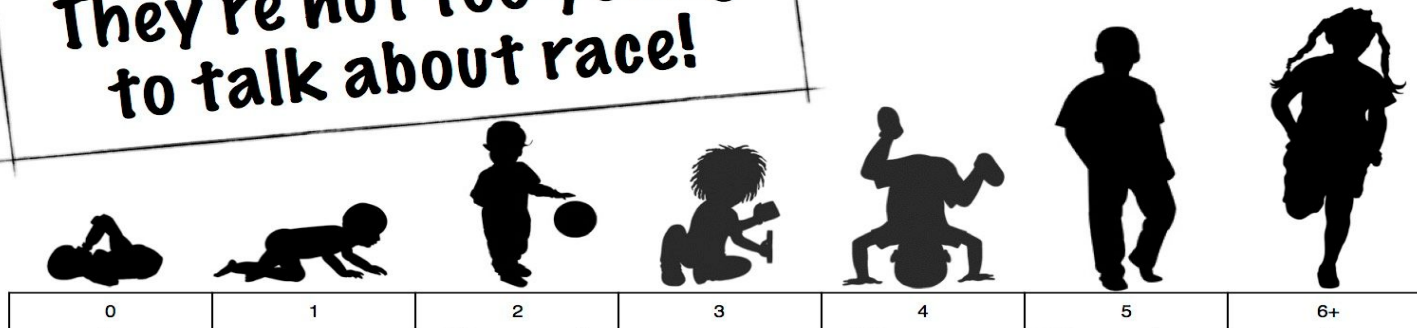
Students should also take pride in their own identities and feel appreciation for others. We are preparing students for the world we are currently in and the world they will enter upon graduation from LPS. All students will come across individuals with multiple identities. Knowing they are seen and heard is just as important as them seeing and hearing others.”

[DEI CIT Final Report](#)

Are students
developmentally ready to
talk about these topics?



They're not too young to talk about race!



At birth, babies look equally at faces of all races. At 3 months, babies look more at faces that match the race of their caregivers. (Kelly et al., 2005)

Children as young as two years use race to reason about people's behaviors. (Hirschfeld, 2008)

By 30 months, most children use race to choose playmates. (Katz & Kofkin, 1997)

Expressions of racial prejudice often peak at ages 4 and 5. (Aboud, 2008)

By five, Black and Latinx children in research settings show no preference toward their own groups compared to Whites; White children at this age remain strongly biased in favor of whiteness. (Dunham et al., 2008)

By kindergarten, children show many of the same racial attitudes that adults in our culture hold—they have already learned to associate some groups with higher status than others. (Kinzler, 2016)

Explicit conversations with 5–7 year olds about interracial friendship can dramatically improve their racial attitudes in as little as a single week. (Bronson & Merryman, 2009)

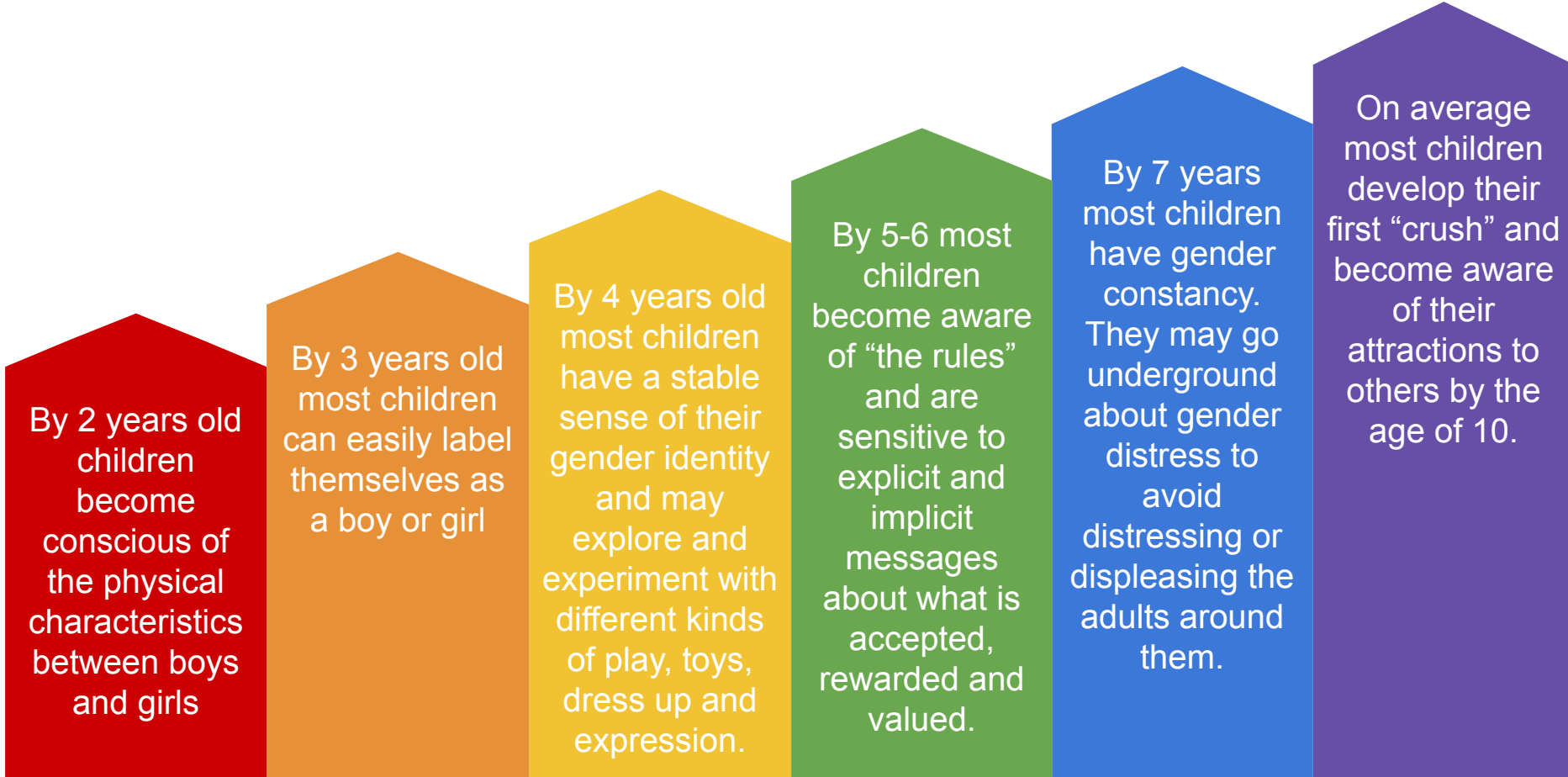
Young children notice and think about race. Adults often worry that talking about race will encourage racial bias in children, but the opposite is true. **Silence about race reinforces racism** by letting children draw their own conclusions based on what they see. Teachers and families can play a powerful role in helping children of all ages develop positive attitudes about race and diversity and skills to promote a more just future—but only if we talk about it!

Do some learning of your own to get ready for conversations with children.

Here are some good places to seek *information and training*:

- Teaching Tolerance — tolerance.org
- Raising Race Conscious Children — raceconscious.org
- Embrace Race — embracerace.org
- Teaching for Change — teachingforchange.org
- AORTA Cooperative — aorta.coop
- Fortify Community Health (CA) — fortifycommunityhealth@gmail.com
- Delaware Valley Assoc. for the Education of Young Children (PA) — dvaeyc.org





By 2 years old children become conscious of the physical characteristics between boys and girls

By 3 years old most children can easily label themselves as a boy or girl

By 4 years old most children have a stable sense of their gender identity and may explore and experiment with different kinds of play, toys, dress up and expression.

By 5-6 most children become aware of “the rules” and are sensitive to explicit and implicit messages about what is accepted, rewarded and valued.

By 7 years most children have gender constancy. They may go underground about gender distress to avoid distressing or displeasing the adults around them.

On average most children develop their first “crush” and become aware of their attractions to others by the age of 10.

The graphic depicts the typical development of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE) in all children (American Psychological Association, n.d., 2015; Kohlberg, 1966; Rafferty, 2022; Ruble, et al. 2007; Russell, et al., 2018)

Why this work, for Lexington students:

The [2021 Lexington Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) (YRBS) shows that in Lexington:

- 1 in 4 students at LHS identify as LGBTQ+
- **LGBTQ+** students at LHS are 4.5 times as likely to be bullied at school
- 3 out of 4 **transgender** students at LHS feel hopeless everyday.

Also cisgender **females** more often report being electronically bullied compared to cisgender males; as do **Middle Eastern, north African** or **Arab American** students compared to other racial/ethnic groups.

Students on **IEPs** or **504 plans** are also more likely to be bullied both at school and online compared to their peers without plans.

DEI Curriculum Work in Lexington



Elementary DEI Curriculum

- **Windows and Mirrors** Curriculum, including what it means to be gender nonconforming/gender expansive, the impacts of teasing, rumors, and bullying, recognizing discrimination, and more, developed and implemented K-5 in 2007.
- **Social Studies** and **Health** curriculums increasingly incorporate topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion to meet the state standards and local goals
- **Understanding Our Differences**, a disability awareness curriculum, piloted at Estabrook and Harrington (prior to 2014) and then adopted districtwide in 2019.
- **Serious Talks** developed at Bowman, implemented 2016

What is Serious Talks?

- Created by Bowman educators, implemented at Bowman in 2016
- 6 themes, spiraling over six years
- 18-25 lessons per year
- Extend the “some, not all” thinking found in other subjects



Examples of Lesson Topics

(Lesson Examples)

1

Why This Work? Importance of Serious Talks and creating safe spaces for learning

2

Identity & Perspective Aspects of identity, including who makes up a community, different colors of skin, gender norms, families, culture, religion; being proud of all the parts of you and understanding different perspectives

3

Privilege & Bias Advantage and disadvantage, fair and unfair, historical examples (voting rights, representation in government)

4

Oppression & Power Links between difference and advantage/disadvantage, as well as rules and fairness, story of Rosa Parks, slavery and Civil Rights Movement, using power for positive change

5

Not Solved Yet Connecting history to today, understanding that problems aren't all in the past. Acknowledging examples of advantage and disadvantage in our communities.

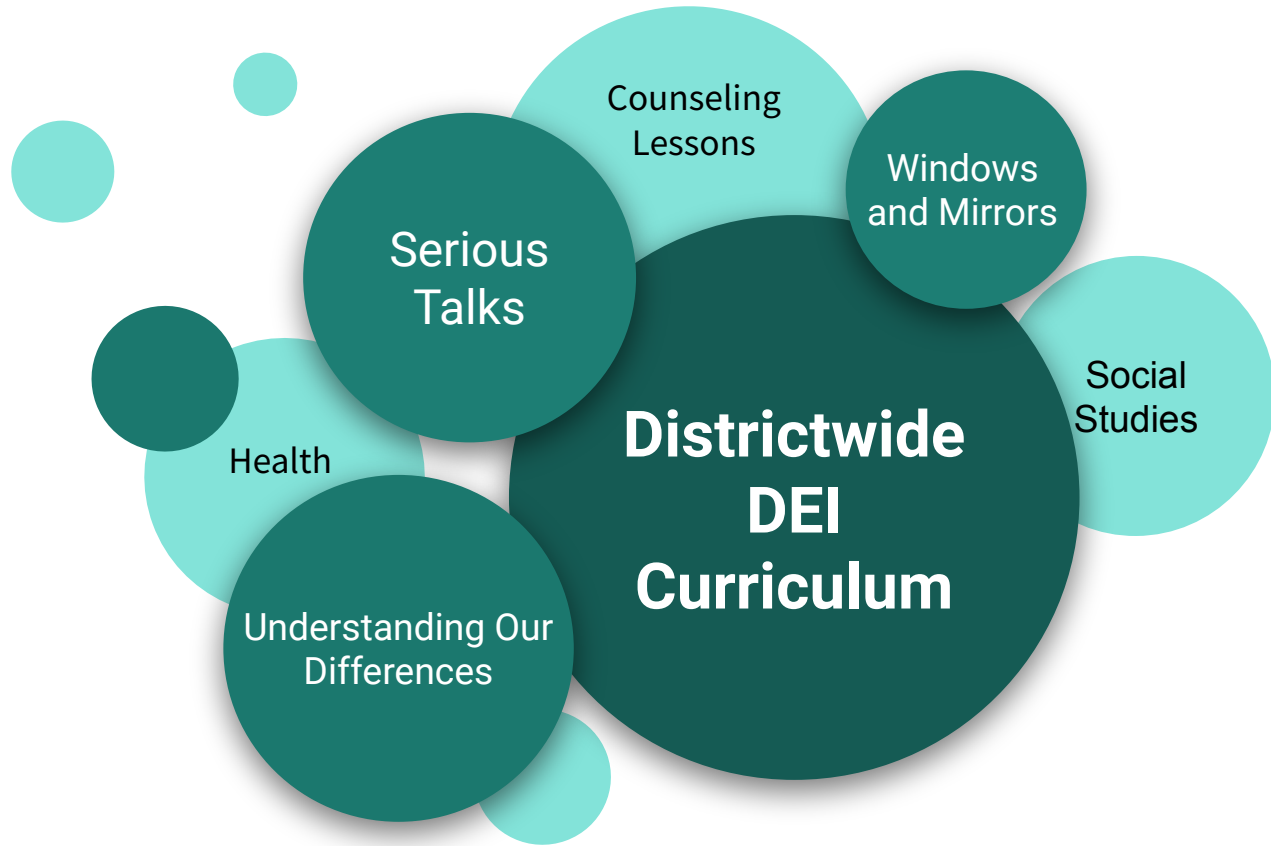
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Looking Ahead Advocacy, allyship, empathy - we all have a voice and can build our skills to stand up for what is right in our classrooms and communities

Teacher and Student Impact (full statements)

“Like our best curriculum in Lexington, the Serious Talks have always been about teaching critical thinking skills. The goal is not to tell students what to think, but how to think, and how to have meaningful conversations with each other, even about difficult topics.”

“Ultimately, my class shared many different expressions of acceptance as we came to conclusions about being ourselves, accepting others for who they are, and naming stereotypes so that they have less power.”



Developing the Districtwide Curriculum

What's Next for the Districtwide DEI Curriculum?

- **Project Timeline**
- **Professional learning** on the Social Justice Standards for all elementary educators this Fall
- Implement 2-4 lessons at each grade level K-5 addressing identity standards in 2023-2024
- Scale up to full PK-5 implementation of 12-16 lessons addressing Social Justice Standards of identity, diversity, justice, and action by 2025-2026.
- “Sunset” Serious Talks, Windows and Mirrors as standalone curricula as they are **integrated** into the districtwide DEI curriculum
- DEI Curriculum enters **Curriculum Review cycle**, with periodic audits, revisions, and opportunities for student and community input

Questions

