

## **TRANSCRIPT: District Leadership Presentation to the Board of Education, “Confronting and Combating Racism”**

**April 12, 2023**

### **Dr. Jason Fine, Superintendent:**

So that’s going take us to our presentation. A couple of things, as we’ve said here in this space before, we continue in a deep state of reflection about who we are and who we want to be as we move forward.

I’ve made statements over the last several board meetings a few months about our work around equity and racism, and talking with our team, we felt it was important that the Board also hear from our incredible leadership team, our building leaders, not just as the superintendent speaking about us, but as a collective.

So please understand the presentation you’re going see tonight. It is not all encompassing of everything that we’re doing. We cannot do that this evening; it’s not possible.

We have been committed to sharing some very surface level things that we’re doing in this arena. We have committed to spending about three to five minutes per department-level or buildings. That’s not a lot of time to get into it all, but we felt it was important for us to share what we’re doing as a collective.

I am incredibly thankful for this team. It is not easy to manage the job with prepping for an important board presentation on top of all the other things, so I’m really appreciative. It is not typical for our team to stand in front of the Board of Education or our community, to share all the amazing things that we’re doing aAnd I really appreciate the work that we were able to press pause and do some of this and lots of great collaborative conversations.

I’m also thankful for the board and our community for supporting this work and allowing us to have this opportunity to discuss and share some of the work that’s happening. I’m going to ask the Board that we press pause on asking questions till the end. We’ve got a slide at the end for questions. Jot down any questions you’ve got and we’re happy to maybe take some of those questions at the end.

I have committed the team. We’re going to stick to our script; we are committed to doing that.

So before I introduce Marcellus before we begin, it is important to note that when we talk about racism we do so not as a blanket term. Historically, we’ve often focused heavily on the interpersonal aspect of racism, which is the prejudice, the bias or discrimination from individuals to another to cause harm. However, to make progress, we must ensure that we don’t just focus our response to the interpersonal racism, but also to the institutional racism that can occur in which policies practices procedures and the culture of an institution or system can cause harm. It’s our hope in tonight’s presentation that we are able to share insight into our systemic approach across the district to address these issues. Mr. Braxton is going start us off this evening by distinguishing what we mean when we discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion, and how we’ve used the equity plan to create systemic instructional change.

Some of this will sound like a review, and that’s good. That means you’re hearing this information before this evening. Following that, our members of our team will speak directly to some of the things that we’re doing that are guided by work within the equity plan which combats and addresses racism systemically. This work allows us to build on the notion of antiracism, a principle that our Board of

Education has made clear through statements, action, and policies, which we really appreciate. As you know, we've talked a lot about this tonight, that our policy work does not happen overnight. A lot of our conversations around this work and improvements and enhancements, and reviews take place in our superintendent's Policy Committee.

That is attended as a standing group. That is, Joanne, Victoria, Marcellus, and myself, and we oftentimes bring in other department leads when it fits for that moment.

So, as you've seen before, changes to policies, have occurred in this area with more to come, and we appreciate our board reps and Marcellus for joining us and network.

### **Marcellus Braxton, Leader of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

I'm committed to staying within that five-minute range, so let's see if I can do that.

I think all this work starts with the Board of Education, and so when we look at what the Board of Education has talked about, we've we talked about integration in particular, and that's really important, so I want to take a few minutes.

Just to talk about the systemic approach we're taking, which the systemic work that we do in this district would not be possible without all the people behind me and the people who are not present there.

But also when we think about anti-racism, you need a strong Board of Education that is going to say, this is our priority.

And so, what we thought was really important was distinguish that work we are doing diversity, inclusion, and representation work, but also we aim to do equity and anti-racism work as well.

And when we talk about diversity, we're talking about a collective collectively, diversity happens and inclusion means to be included in the structure.

And then we also hear the word representation. Are we representing?

In what spaces are we represented? And that means having a certain identity or viewpoint or characteristic that can be seen and ready to contribute.

And we wanted to make that distinction because we are doing that work.

But we also wanted to know that those methods focus on those who have been harmed in the process.

That is important. But also, there's a distinction between equity and anti-racism as well, because there's that.

And there's also the fairness and justice that goes along with that.

And what anti-racism means has been outlined by the Board of Education. It means that acknowledging, identifying, and eliminating racism by disrupting and transforming through systems structures and policies. That's why I'm really glad Dr. Fine talked about the work that the Board of Education is doing, in the Policy Committee, for instance. That speaks to equity in particular, and also by doing this work so just to Oh, well, now, already messed up.

We're talking about those who have been harmed, oppressed or marginalized, or under-resourced. But also what we're doing is we're examining power structures and how they're put into place by those who do the pressing.

I always want to make sure we're giving credit to our staff members because they're doing both.

They're thinking about diversity, inclusion, representation, but also thinking they're about equity and anti-racism.

I want to talk about the Equity Plan because all of this is in support of the work that the people behind me and those who are not present are doing.

The question that keeps coming up, and we answered earlier this week, is what are you dealing with equity plan for systemic change.

I want to give just a brief outline what that looks like.

The first way to do that is to say, "What is the problem"?

Because there's a problem that needs to be addressed.

We passed an Equity Policy. And now we have an Equity Plan.

The problem that we fundamentally have – and it's not just us – throughout K through 12, throughout the country – they say, "How do you determine whether there is an issue in equity? And then what do you do about it?"

And so, I wanted to go over some ways in which we're starting to implement this Equity Plan.

The first thing is our message of communication. We have got remark after remarks, saying, there's something that seems a little bit different about the communication that you're doing now.

That is directly related to the Equity Plan, because the Equity Plan operates essentially like a checklist.

When we think about how are we going to communicate to the public, how we're going to communicate to the students, the staff, and each other, we use that as a guide. Also, if you go to our website, you'd see another way of communication. We now have an Equity Reporting Tool. Through that plan we were able to discover there is a gap.

We have our stay-safe reporting, which is being used, but we also heard from our community that we need another reporting tool.

We need another way to really think about equity. What happens is now we have that tool on our website. We have people who are saying, "I'm going to use that tool."

And then what happens is whenever we get something, it goes to our central administration and also to our building administration.

And we start implementing the plan based on that.

We're also doing a lot of work. People always ask about curriculum, and they say, "How can you actually implement equity in the curriculum when you have state standards?" And the answer is, you can. You absolutely can do that.

So, we are working. And we're going to talk about it more. Credit to those behind me – we're doing it right now, K through 12. We are doing this curriculum review process and it's not just the diversity, inclusion, and representation.

And that's why I talked about it. Representation is saying, "do you have books that have representation in them? That's really important. But there's also the component of saying, "When you think about your curriculum within the state standards, are you thinking about equity?" And so, we're undergoing that process as well.

I have some of the questions I wanted to just share.

When we meet with our staff members, whether that is kindergarten to twelfth grade, we say, "Let's look at your state standards. Let's look at what you're doing, and let's think about some of the questions you're asking and think about how that looks with equity."

Some of the questions we might say are: "Is this a good thing? For whom? Who is harmed? Whose story was told, and who is the storyteller? What story is missing or deemphasized? What role does power structure and control play? Who is this impacted? How's it influenced today? What is the role bias? And how are we examining this?"

So, as you see, we now have state standards that we're adhering to, but we have a different way of making sure that we're adhering to those state standards. That is based on equity and based on anti-racism in particular. That was just briefly some of the questions that we even think about for that process.

So now you have people coming to the table, saying, we're not just talking about representation. We're talking about how every single component of every single thing that we teach is guided in equity.

Just a few other things, that we're going to talk about. Dr. Williams is going to talk about this more elegantly than I could, but it's the Equity Plan that also allows us to look at food security.

It's really important because we look at the hierarchy of needs. We have to make sure basic needs, whether we're talking about physical, mental, health, etc. But one thing that I am really proud of is that this Equity Plan has helped us when we have a student, staff, or community-initiated issue and concern.

So something goes to Dr. Fine, for instance. It's not just okay to say, "We have to address this. Let's look at what we have in the plan, and let's go through the checklist to make sure all these things have been done in a uniform way to make sure that we have no gaps."

We're addressing those gaps and in doing this, we're thinking about how things been done in the past. How should they be done and then how are we going to think about this three to five years from now. This has been really helpful with some of the work that we're going to talk about.

Then finally, the strategic plan implementation. The strategic plan and Equity Plan work in tandem in particular. And so when we have more robust conversations, about a strategic plan, you're going to see there are going to be words that say, "review," "create," and "audit."

The Equity Plan is allowing us to say what this is.

Review. We now have a mechanism for review.

When it says, Create, we have a mechanism for that.

When it says, Audit, audit is that word that people hate to hear because they're like, what does that really mean? But now we have a plan to say, oh, you want us to audit the curriculum.

Well, now our plan is in place to allow us to do that. And each building and department is using that.

I also want to talk about this term "proactive." That's really important, too, because people say, "Oh, let's not be reactive. Let's be proactive." And this also allowed us to be practice in multiple ways.

So oftentimes people think about the first, you should be proactive to prevent or disrupt, but also one thing that we noted is that you cannot prevent and disrupt everything. So, there's another way being practiced, and that's being proactive and being prepared to respond to conflict. That's what some of the other things I talked about with communication are so important.

You want to prevent things from happening, but if they do happen, are you prepared to address that in the correct way?

And then finally, some really collective district work. Our climate committee, I want to give a big shout out to them, I hope some of them are watching. We have grown from where we were last year to where we are this year.

The work that we've done in restorative practice has really been impactful.

We are now at the point where, a year a year ago we weren't sure that everyone in the district even understood what restorative practices were. Some people did. Some people didn't.

Now we have that understanding. And now we're thinking about what's that look like to implement in the classroom and outside the classroom?

And that's really important, because you're going to hear people behind me talk about culture and community in particular.

We're guiding that work to say, "how do you create a community in which you are disrupting the things you don't want to see, and you can respond to conflict?"

And we're doing some external work, too, with some external folks as well.

We know that we can't just operate in silos.

With the climate committee, we're also thinking about, "what does it look like to have these community conversations and healing, etcetera."

I'm running out of time, but I also wanted to say, when we talked about checklist, this is what I mean.

This checklist. If any single person in the district, (and we do this whether it's a student staff administrator) they say I think we have an issue of equity. And this is happening throughout our district and you're going to hear some about it.

The first thing we say is, “What needs to happen now, and what needs to happen later, long term? Who should be involved.” This collective work -- we work as a collective – asks, “What does it mean to be involved? And when should they be involved? And what’s communication look like?”

And then this is also helped us think about what specific facts and data and outcomes we really need. It’s not just a matter of we think it’s working. It’s, “What specifically do we need?” And these last two slides are just talking about our approach.

But I think there’s really important just for both here and folks at home to really see that we have this approach, not just for individual issue, but also when we’re thinking about a systemic way systemic way, because in order for us to continue making progress as a district we always have to think systemically. We can’t say we’re solving a problem today. And that probably exists today.

It’s we’re trying to solve a problem today, but we’re also thinking about what needs to happen a year from now, and three years from now, or five years from now to create the culture that we want.

You’re going hear more about that from the folks that are going to follow me now. But this work has helped inform the culture that we’re trying to create and also helped us recognize where we have come up short and how we don’t want to do that anymore.

And so now, I want to turn it over to Dr. Harley Williams who’s going to tell you some more specific things.

### **Dr. Harley Williams, Director of Facilities & Operations**

From an operations perspective, we looked at what we’ve done the last couple of months. That was our task. We were asked what we do in our department around equity, inclusion, what steps we take, and what are some new initiatives and things like that.

So, I’m happy to share with you what we’ve accomplished in the last couple of months.

The Operation Department is made up of food service, custodial, maintenance, athletics, and theater. Those are the areas that I oversee.

The leaders in each department chose the book, “What If? Short Stories to Spark Inclusion Diversity Dialogue by Stephen Robbins as a book study for our department this year. That’s one thing I’ll start off with.

A couple of things that we’ve created this year, and sometimes it’s what Marcelius has talked about. Sometimes we react and sometimes we try to do proactively. And one of the things that we were looking at this year is, how do we help people that are immobile get out of the building in a time of a crisis?

And so we looked at best practices and created evacuation guidelines for mobility issues for those with mobility issues and I think it’s important that we know our old buildings. The ADA requirements are kind of set when the building is built, but what we try to do is communicate with the special needs department and find that students that have maybe accessibility needs that we can accomplish and through renovation or something in the summer, kind of small chunks that way, I think those are important things from the facility side.

In January 2023, we offered universal access to breakfast for our students, for many student-centered reasons. These lunches are being paid by ESSR dollars, and we are hoping to budget these funds next year when ESSR expires, which is about \$130,000.

Before the program started, we were averaging a 107 students throughout the district, eating breakfast each day, and now we're averaging 350 students eating breakfast each day, and we all know how important it is for a healthy meal to start the day. So that's kind of exciting data for us.

In athletics, on March 8th, Eli Goldberger organized a webinar for our coaches titled, "Sports can battle racism." The webinar was sponsored by the positive coaching alliance and the goal of this training develop solutions that worked about our racism within the environment of sports.

We created a document for our athletic coaches to use.

Another topic here is our gender, diversity, inclusivity guidance.

We created that document for our coaches to assist in supporting our transgender student athletes.

Again, doing a research through other best practices, and getting that in the hands of coaches as a proactive measure.

One thing we picked up at a conference that we were going put in our Coaches Handbook is how we protect players. You hear a lot of times our players, when they travel to other places, we'll hear offensive and derogatory slurs.

One of the things we heard in the "battle-for-racism" webinars, I guess, that's a good idea, because I mean you coach long enough you figure these things out, but not all of our coaches have had years of experience.

There's sometimes are 23-, 24-year-old people. So, we're going to add language to our coach's handbook. And this language will read that anytime players or coaches, experience derogatory or offensive comments, racist, anti-semitic sexist, homophobic slurs for behaviors, then immediate action will be taken to keep students safe. Bexley coaches will call a timeout and speak with appropriate coaches, officials, and referees about questionable behavior, and ask that the Ohio High School Athletic Association rules be adhere to.

If the offending behavior persists, actually, student athletes and coaches have two options. One is to leave the playing facility, report to a safe space, and wait for buses to leave the sporting event. Or to report to a safe space, and have discussions, with athletic directors and officials to determine if the sporting event can continue.

In our theater department, going forward, we'll change and improve the process of selecting shows to perform. While we continue to work on these improvements, we know that they will include making decisions on what shows will be produced during the summer before each school year, ensuring we take time for careful selection, guaranteeing the students are part of that show-selection process, and finally agreeing to new criteria for reviewing the shows under consideration.

At this time, I'll turn the podium over to the Director of Human Relations and Melissa Klosterman-Lando.

**Melissa Klosterman-Lando, Director of Employee Relations & Human Resources**

Good evening, everyone, and thank you for this opportunity tonight for us to share with you as well as our community that might be listening. We appreciate your time like Dr. Williams said.

My name is Melissa Klosterman-Lando, Director of Employer Relations and also Human Resources, enrollment, licensure, Title, IX, residency, and a couple other things, including our approach to equity, specifically in equipment, hiring, and diversifying our staff.

As Dr. Fine and Mr. Braxton have shared, it is not a standalone event, or one thing. Rather requires a systemic approach to review what is in place, how it has marginalized or excluded people, specifically black people and people of color, and consider how to repair and address barriers that exist in our practices specifically, our hiring practices, asking, "How can we change procedures? How can we ensure our practices are more inclusive in what we're doing?"

Our Equity Policy, one that you put in place, allows for our Equity Plan to come to fruition and be an opportunity for us to act intentionally and focus on addressing racism and change toward betterment. We're asking ourselves, how have I changed How do I need to change? How do I receive information from others?

How do I respond? What do I need to do to un-normalize our hiring practices and make new norms, for us to change our narrative?

It begins with providing a structure that embeds inclusion into each step.

We're asking, how is this opportunity more equitable to our potential candidates?

How can we diversify our profession and school district?

How are we expanding our candidate pool? How are we eliminating barriers for our candidates and interviews?

I had to rethink our hiring process as a whole, from off-boarding of the resignations and retirements to vacancy, postings, to job description, revisions, advertising openings, networking, marketing, polling candidates, vetting interviewing hiring and onboarding.

So, how we expand and diversify our pool? Well, by sending job postings and inviting our community organizations to be part of the process, and the advertisement.

We can begin to diversify our pool by not just putting it on our website, but actually sending our postings to our community organizations like, DARN, Bexley Minority Parents Alliance, SEPTO, Bexley Pride, and job boards.

Our technical schools, our college and university partners, for sure as well as a recent partner with us, which is Chris, the community refugee and immigration services.

Those are one way. We've also increased our advertising pool beyond just newsletters and social media.

And we've shared our employment opportunities on radio stations.



We're currently in negotiations with Urban one Columbus Magic 95.5/106.3/107.5, which is a media company that amplifies the voice of Black America.

We're also setting up a partnership with Columbus Black, a media outlet, that, but also a partner in black wellness, which includes an email distribution to support black employment.

Most recently, I've also connected with Central State University's office of strategic partnerships and external affairs to see how we can partner with them as one of the very few HBCUs in Ohio.

These are just some of the ways that we are expanding our pool to diversify our staff in Bexley. We also continue to look at a better way to diversify our interview teams and to better assess our candidates and eliminate barriers for candidates.

By reviewing this practice, we can allow ourselves a better opportunity to get to know our candidates. Mr. Braxton and I have teamed together many, many times, but most recently and continuously we review the framework for interviewing. Some of the changes include asking candidates for feedback after the interview or the pre-interview process, asking questions like, "What made you feel like you should apply to Bexley Schools? How did you feel included, highlighted even, in Bexley's process?"

We've insured intentionality in the interview questions and also accessibility.

We place a copy of the questions on the table or paste them in the Zoom link if it's an interview on Zoom, so they don't have to solely focus on hearing the questions, but can have them in front of them.

This helps with stability and allows for them to participate with a little bit more ease, so we can get to know them a little better.

I screen candidates who aren't licensed for positions and make sure that our positions are filled with licensed people.

But I also now screen candidates who are competent to answer questions about diversity or belonging equity and inclusion also in our process. Candidates are now sent a copy ahead of time of our Equity Policy and our commitment plan, which highlights belonging in equity and wellness.

Similar to other tools that are principals, directors, and admin, are using, we're asking questions like, "Who does this include? "Who are we missing? Or rather, who are not identifying and not being in tune with?"

Our conversations are happening at all levels of hiring and recruitment across our district.

But also our system of hiring reaches beyond what our administrators and staff can do.

We need the support from you and our community, which leads me to share about our most recent event, which was our networking and informational event. This past February we partnered with BMPA. Bexley Pride, and our Special Education PTO to host an event that focuses on a time for potential candidates who are currently underrepresented in public education, to gather and learn about employment in Bexley schools.

Studies show that approximately 60% of educators work within just 15 to 20 miles of where they grew up. With that in mind, it is important that we continue to host events with our community partners to diversify our educators in our pool.

Next, I want to share about our partnership with the Ohio University's Patent College of Education. Specifically, the Brothers RISE, which is Rallying to Inspire and Shape Education program. This is from Jason Rawls and Marquis Param.

This program intends to impact that diversity with the teaching professionals, specifically affecting how black men are recruited, retained, and graduated in the education profession.

Ohio University has written a grant to the State of Ohio and asked us to partner with them.

You might know, but statistics share currently on a national level and show that black student population is around 50%. Yet, the percentage of black male teachers in the United States is 3%. The State of Ohio's condition is worse, with just under 1.3% of black male teachers, while black students are around 16% of Ohio's student population. We know that black students benefit from having teachers who look like them.

The work in diversifying the education workforce has led to our partnership with the Patent College of Education.

Specifically, the Brothers RISE Ohio University students will meet and work with Bexley students in the upcoming year and two years specifically, are by poc males in grades 6 through 12, to increase enthusiasm and interest in becoming an educator or potentially attending OU's college of education and attending the Brothers RISE program. The other part of the partnership is that the Brothers RISE program would come here to student teach or observe teachers' instruction.

We are also currently in conversations with the Ohio State University's Bright Fellow program.

The Bright Fellowships Leadership Development program is a paradigm shift from traditional training models to a unique partnership between OSU's Fisher College of Business and OSU's College of Education and Human Ecology, because of this distinct collaboration between the two colleges, the Bright approach to K-12 leadership training is rather innovative, diverse, and without an equal across nation. Our hope is to host two Bright Fellows this next school year in our school buildings.

You might know that Raquel Armstrong, our current middle school assistant principal, is a graduate of the Bright program.

From several years ago, and our commitment would be for a long-term, year-long School Leadership, Residency, Slash Internship, next school year to support developing capacity and leading antiracist change.

#### **Dr. Shirley Hamilton, Director of Curriculum & Gifted**

Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to share.

I am the first of four speakers representing the Teaching and Learning Department.

I'm going to talk about curriculum and gifted, which is my area, and in terms of curriculum review processes, I have to give Marcellus a huge shout-out for all of the influence that he has provided in the review process.

We've done all of the committees in terms of the social studies and world language, which are the two areas that we're reviewing this year, and looked at, as Marcellus indicated, representation, voice perspective language, consistency, alignment.

We've conducted these audits with each department through the lens of equity and inclusion.

And recently, as Marcellus pointed out, we met with the elementary curriculum review team for a half-day session, and Marcellus was very helpful in terms of helping develop these questions – the additional questions that he mentioned – that we've asked of all of our elementary social studies.

We've also shared these questions with our middle and High School group as well.

Just yesterday we had a half-day session again with Marcellus, and Steve Shapiro was there.

Barb was there, a number of people, Mr. Caudill was there, as well, and we actually looked at these questions. Hopefully, they'll be able to incorporate those in the middle school and high school.

So, basically, all of K-12 has been influenced by this lens of equity and inclusion based on Marcellus's influence, so we really appreciate that and I think we've really changed how they're looking at their curriculum, looking at equity, looking at inclusion and it's made a huge difference.

I believe teachers are also working. Marcellus met with elementary teachers' review team to work through various units as grade-level themes.

We're going to do that in the future. In the next couple of weeks, he's going to meet with them, not only as he did when he met with the reviews team, but we're going to meet with all teachers at each grade level and Marcellus is going to go through look at their actual lessons and influence their daily lessons. And so, as I said just recently, yesterday, we did the same thing with middle school and high school Social Studies Department members, and we again looked at those questions and we are examining our curriculum through all of these questions and audits.

As far as the Talent Development program goes, which gets into kind of the gifted area, a new program this year that we're really excited about that is for all students in grades 1-3, is teaching higher-level thinking skills and enrichment activities in every classroom, every building, grades 1 through 3.

Approximately 40-minute lessons are conducted each week by our talent development coordinators. It's based on four types of primary education thinking skills, the PETS curriculum, and it focuses on four types of thinking skills and higher-level thinking, convergent thinking, divergent thinking, visual thinking, or visual spatial perception and evaluative thinking and the purpose of this program is to build critical and creative thinking skills and all of our students. It provides opportunities for students with potential to be challenged and, number 3, assist with identifying students from underrepresented populations who may be eligible to be identified as gifted and talented. We've conducted staff and parent surveys about the program. We did this in January as a mid-year progress, monitoring check-in.

We also conducted preassessment. Assessing student growth data and looking. And we analyzed that by grade level. And the results of these assessments are very positive.

**Barb Gentile Green, Director of Student Services & Accessibility**

Thank you. It's good to be here. Cathy (Rodeheffer) and I work together on this slide we try to highlight a couple of systems that are proactive, and then, as well as like Marcelius said, we need some systems to respond when there is a crisis.

So, the first one is our crisis team. We developed a district-level crisis team this year with representation from many members of our staff and we actually used that team to be able to respond to the February incident.

And what that team does is look at what is needed, what action steps we have, and we actually use that team to be able to respond to the February incident.

And what's responsible for following through. I'm doing those different action steps. What did we need to support our students?

What did we need to support our staff, as at this time we have all of our school counselors, school psychologists, and our mental health specialists, and one administrator so far trained in the Prepare Method, which is an evidence-based crisis response, mental health-support model. The next step with that is to train the rest of the administration in that and another step is to have our building teams, our building crisis-level teams.

The next thing I want to talk about is our mental health and behavioral support.

We are very fortunate to have a partnership with nationwide Children's Hospital.

They have counselors in our buildings, they collaborate with us to meet the needs of our students, and in after the incident in February the school psychologists came together with the school counselors, the mental health providers from Nationwide Children's, Marcelius, and our school counselors developed talking circles.

For students who needed the support with our black students, and really was able to meet their needs over several sessions that they held.

We're ongoing with that with some circles at the high school to develop those skills within our school counselors.

So, it's a great partnership between us and Nationwide Children's.

We also have Crisis Prevention Institute trainers in our district. I've never worked in a place that has their own trainers. It's wonderful.

We have two staff members and they're really able to provide that targeted training embedded right in our school schedule and all of our staff this year received the verbal de-escalation training. Those preventative strategies that we can use to support our students and deescalate situations that might be becoming escalated.

And then we have certain teams throughout the district who are trained in the physical control portion of CPI, so that if there is a need, we do it safely to support our students.

With the faculty support, our data on restraint and seclusion is reviewed every month and we are in a very much better place this year than we were last year in terms of our numbers, and they are each month we look at them with our behavior specialist, and they are not rising as they had last year. So, we're really happy about that.

The MTSS Guidebook was developed last year as a result of a corrective action that the Special Education Department had to respond to from the Ohio Department of Education and that was because there was an over-identification of black males in the category of specific learning disability and so the team had to develop a response to that. How the district gets to that is the State gives a risk-ratio factor, and if it is over 2.5, meaning you identify 2 and a half times peers over any certain subgroup, then you are in this corrective action.

So the previous team developed the Multi-Tiered System of Support Guidebook, but because of the timeline it wasn't able to be trained across all staff.

When the new team was hired this year in Central Office, we took a look at that and are refining that guidebook with a little bit of a more focus on a proactive removal of barriers and kind of a different approach. In looking at what barriers are there within our environment or instruction, or assessment versus what's wrong with the child? It's a shift in how we're looking at supporting our students and then what interventions do we have in place.

Those are the four kind of programs that we wanted to highlight from the Student Services Department. Thank you.

### **Brad Pettit, Director of Technology**

I know some of this might sound secondary to the things that you're hearing here, but as Mr. Braxton mentioned, and others about being proactive, we want to make sure we're a part of that as well.

So, from our perspective in the Technology Department, we're looking for those proactive ways to improve supporting student interaction with their peers online and how we make sure we treat one another. This is our digital wellness. That's ultimately our focus for this.

Before the pandemic, our district was one of the leaders in the state on trying to prepare digital wellness resources. We were part of a consortium to do that work. We created a website for parents to find ways to help with social media, to find the pieces to help with interacting.

Now what we're focusing on is making sure that this is a huge pillar of our next Tech Plan that we would hope to adopt in the fall. So, continuing that work moving forward, focusing more specifically on online etiquette and digital citizenship and making sure that we give teachers resources, so that in those moments of technology integration that we're able to address and prepare for those moments when being reactive isn't avoidable. When we have inappropriate treatment of one another, we want to make sure that our administrative staff are getting the information as fast and as helpful as possible.

We have started to increase our ways in which we're able to identify devices on our networks.

Wireless network to be able to do that even further.

**Dr. Kristin Robbins, High School Principal, and Jason Caudill, Middle School Principal (Video Presentation)**

Dr. Robbins: Good evening and thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you this evening over the past few years. We've seen the power of student voice and action during times of crisis right here in Bexley.

But these moments have often come when we, as adults, aren't clear what the next best steps should be.

We knew we had to do better this time, and that meant intentional listening to and supporting students.

Last summer we were fortunate to have 52 district staff members participate in professional development, the Summer Institute for Authentic Learning and Leadership. This two-day conference helped us better understand the power of student agency.

We continue this learning with learning inspired throughout the year, and we believe that this learning has enabled us to better support student agency and respond differently and more effectively than other incidents that may have seen similar situations.

Jason Caudill: Here are some examples of how we supported our students over the past few months.

First of all, we acknowledged and took accountability for the harm done, through districtwide and building-specific communications.

Second, we intentionally focused on those that were directly harmed, in this case black students and staff, rather than talking about everyone.

Third, we first created safe spaces to allow black students and staff to grieve and process and share what they needed, and fourth, based on what we heard, we aligned time and resources to meet those needs.

Kristin Robbins:

For example, students identified microaggressions, microaggressions, and other acts they have personally experienced and that make them feel unsafe in our schools. As a result, we provided peer-reviewed strategies to our staff members for interrupting acts of racism in the classroom and practiced those together.

High school staff worked on strategies for recognizing and avoiding equity detours. In equity detours, our mindsets that create an illusion of progress toward equity while cementing or even exacerbating inequity.

Jason Caudill: Middle school students were provided the time and support to address their peers during grade-level assemblies about their own experiences in Bexley City schools, and the impact on the school community.

No school teachers have been leading community circles during study hall time.

The circles encourage connections and provide a structure to discuss a variety of things, including difficult topics that impact the students' sense of belonging. We know that our schools and community

will continue to be challenged by incidents of racism, sexism, ignorance, hatred, and intolerance, but we are better equipped now to respond and empower our students.

**Jeannine Hetzler, Cassingham Elementary Principal, and Rachel Niswander, Maryland Elementary Principal**

Jeannine Hetzler: Rachel and I are here to represent the elementary principals. We're a tight trio. Some folks call us terrific. But it's an honor to work with Nyesha (Clayton) and we've asked her to sit this one out so that we can represent for her.

We know that it's important for our institution to do that and offer her some grace.

We collaborate, we communicate, and we actually plan the three of us together to meet the needs of our distinct buildings, for the betterment of all Bexley elementary school students.

And it's an honor to be able to work with these amazing women to do that.

There was absolute agreement from our elementary team that a response was warranted from every single elementary faculty member to students and families in our school district.

There was no question from us about that anti-racism is a lifelong and career-long endeavor for many of us, and we felt passionately about that. And still do.

We felt that when an incident like this happened in any school, it impacts all of us.

The steps that we took immediately were to ensure that each staff member read the historical context, that Mr. Caudill had shared with middle school faculty staff families and students.

We also shared that historical context with our fourth- and fifth-grade classes, and communicating with families that we wanted there to be no question about a further response should/when another incident like this would happen or should another incident like this happen. We shared Toolkits with teachers and shared resources with families as well around that incident.

We also aligned and took a look at our protocols for establishing our morning announcement routines, making sure that they were in step with our colleagues in the middle school and high School, and that there was clear oversight. We took steps to communicate with families of students of color to acknowledge the incident, to provide space for students to process and share their voices should families be interested in that and connect with other students and faculty of color.

We also provided opportunities for those conversations with our faculty of color, wanting to make sure that they knew that space for that was really important and critical for us. We shared emails with families, about resources, as those conversations were taking place too.

Rachel Niswander: Hello. Our communication moves from response to our next steps moving forward. The faculty conversations helped to inform the ways that we are honing our methods and our practices.

Staff had space and time, as Ms. Hetzler had shared. Our teachers sought permission to pause the academic rigor to prioritize the importance of our conversations.

Surprise, delight, and joy. Because, you know, I'm Team Joy, but we intentionally made sure to highlight black joy.

We refocused our responsive classroom, which is like our morning meetings, our activities to strengthen our relationships between peer-to-peer and our staff and our students. Those conversations allowed more honest and open and safe space for our students. These are similar to the high school/middle school conversations in their community circles.

As we talked about literature and our read-alouds, we knew that we needed to talk about the responsibility that we have to vet the materials. We looked at representation, ensuring that portrayals are informed.

Our focus is to equip students with skills for deep and close discussions, critical thinking, multiple perspectives, as well as that representation.

We want to talk about the highlight in our work with BMPA and our PTO collaboration through our literature that we have shared our resources with websites that we shared, how we've worked with PTO to talk about our artists in the schools, our guest speakers, to look at more diversity for our students and their representation.

We've had Lunch-and-Learn seminars for students, called Difference Makers.

Parents, teachers, community engagement and critical important conversations through books.

Again, there's websites, podcasts, and our own articles and conversations.

Ms. Hetzler is coming back up to touch base about our Wit and Wisdom experiences that PTO has also helped to engage in, making sure that, again, that we're vetting clear representation for our students.

Jeannine Hetzler: I want to shout out to Nyasha, who's established the Difference Makers' Lunch-and-Learn options for students at Montrose. It's a model that we want to explore and employ at Castsngham and at Maryland, to make sure that we are providing that similar opportunity. We certainly can't capture all that's been put out there already at Montrose, but we want to build on that format. It seemed to be really, really helpful for students and teachers are engaged.

As Rachel was mentioning in a critical review of our Wit and Wisdom matrix, which is here on the slide for you, this outlines the units or modules of study that students are experiencing across the school year, and we've taken a critical review of those we really are excited about because this curriculum provides an opportunity unlike we've seen in a long time, for transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary studies to return to our elementary classrooms.

And we're using this as a structure and foundation. So part of the work that Shirley was alluding to with Marcellus and review with our social studies curriculum review is to make sure that we are using this model then to integrate and embed our social studies curriculum and work take to take that step and then, as we review science, we'll make sure that we're embedding and making alignment across the year for students, so that they see the connections within and across English language, arts, social studies, science, and mathematics.



It's a really exciting curriculum. It helps us really take a deep dive into those critical-thinking skills. We've had some very specific discussions about particular modules and we wanted to highlight two of them with you.

Our second-grade module number 3, "Civil Rights Heroes." How can people respond to injustice? That was just beginning in February.

So we wanted to take a step back with our second-grade teams to make sure that they had what they needed and felt supported as they began that unit and asked what else they needed to teach that unit in that module, in the way that they knew that they wanted to teach it in light of what we were going through as a district. One conversation that happened at Maryland, which was very transformative for all of us, was that teachers said, "Can we pause on academics for a minute so that we can have some read-aloud conversations? – Make sure that we're building that community and really connecting again with students."

We were like, of course! That's what this is about, and we can't do the other work, unless we make sure that we regroup and do that.

So, when we start to have these conversations with faculty, it's not just that we're talking about that and reviewing. We are taking action steps and making sure that we're implementing what our faculty's letting us know.

Unit one, for fifth grade, "Cultures and Conflict." This does a really beautiful job of setting the stage for our fifth graders to begin to really, critically analyze cultural perspectives and beliefs.

They do that by starting to look at the expression of cultural beliefs by one perspective and locating evidence through critical, close reading of arguments, being able to make an argument about someone's perspective based on what they've written, finding that evidence then they're able to take that skill forward and create and write and express their own perspective, citing evidence about that perspective. They've really taken on a critical examination of the world around them too. Our teachers report over and over again how perceptive our students are!

I've been privileged to have some conversations with students that are transformative, and I can directly correlate it back to the conversations that they're having as they examine these units and really look at themselves, their culture, and their world, so they can figure out who they are in it.

So we're eager to continue this critical review and to create Year 2 of Wit and Wisdom with an even deeper implementation of our other curricular areas and then audit, how we're going moving forward.

**Dr. Jason Fine:**

We're in Phase II of our strategic plan, which we're really thankful for.

The participation we've had during Phase I. Phase I took place right before winter break. Phase II has taken place since winter break and the slide shows you that we started this conversation with four subcommittees, Culture Subcommittee, DEI Subcommittee, Facilities Subcommittee, and Teaching and Learning Subcommittee.

We've had some really important conversations coming out of our DEI Subcommittee and subcommittee chairs have been really instrumental in this work.

The recommendation was to make a decision to weave the DEI objectives into the recommendations of the other three focus areas rather than separately state a DEI-specific goal.

And we thought that was really powerful. We supported that work, and, as a result, the next strategic plan will consider decision making with the lens or through the lens of DEI.

We wanted to make sure that DEI was not siloed through our strategic plan, but woven throughout. So that's an important piece for now.

Just so that you know, we're meeting with our SSPAC, our strategic or our Superintendent's Strategic Planning Advisory Committee and we're going to meet with our subcommittee participants and we're going to share where we are. We've got some really exciting goals and objectives to share with that group.

We appreciate Dr. Jaede and Ms. Powers who have been a big part of those committees, as well as our Steering Committee, and we look forward to nearing a rollout at the May Board meeting. So, you'll have some information to read here shortly.

We also recognize that this work is not just done in our schools.

We have heard plenty of feedback from our community that this is also a community conversation.

This issue is not unique to Bexley, but we believe we have a unique opportunity to unite as a community to address it collectively.

So, One Bexley. In early February I got a call from the mayor, Ben Kessler, who talked about how we can come together as the city, as the schools, and as our libraries, to provide programming for our community.

Steve Shapiro couldn't be here tonight, but he's been a part of this. You'll hear that Marcelius, Alissha, and Joanne have been part of this, as well, alongside me.

**Steve Shapiro, Leader of Experiential Learning (Video presentation):**

Good evening. Tonight's board presentation highlights the many steps we're taking to make Bexley City Schools a welcoming, safe and equitable space for our students and families.

Other institutions in our city are also taking actions to move their organizations toward these goals.

In addition to these initiatives, Dr. Fine has joined with Mayor Ben Kessler and Bexley Library Director Ben Heckman to spirit a more universal, citywide effort aimed at fostering a welcoming and inclusive Bexley for all. They titled that citywide initiative, One Bexley.

They convened a collection of city leaders to begin to ideate strategies, to make a culture shift in Bexley, to help us reckon with our city's history of exclusion, and with the legacy of non-white people's experiences of exclusion and marginalization when they attempt to live in or travel through Bexley.

The goal of One Bexley is to help Bexley residents collectively create an intentional culture of allyship and belonging for all people.

Bexley City schools has been represented in this initiative by Dr. Fine, by school board members Joanne Pickrell and Alissha Mitchell, by DEI leader Marcellus Braxton, and by myself.

One Bexley will expand beyond its initial leadership team with an opening planning meeting for other community members who would like to be leaders in this charge.

We will gather next Wednesday evening at the Bexley Public Library at 6:30 p.m.

All are invited to attend. We'll also hold an even larger community event for anyone interested in One Bexley sometime in May. Our intention is for One Bexley's educational and engagement mission to create the experience of universal belonging that sets a positive context for the many equity and belonging initiatives that we will continue to take in Bexley City Schools.

**Dr. Jason Fine:**

The next slide just gives you the information about the event that we're having next Wednesday, April 19, 6:30 p.m. in the Bexley Public Library Auditorium. Anyone is invited to attend, and we look forward to having a conversation as a community level to determine next steps.

So, I know that was a lot, and I think that's okay. I think it's important that we put that time in.

And I want to thank this team.

This team is a gift And I'm really thankful to be a part of this team and to walk alongside this team.

I never hear, "I can't!" I never hear, "I won't!" I never hear, "We don't think it's possible."

And it is not easy to stand in this type of setting and share all the incredible things that we're doing, but we're not done.

We have a lot that we still have ahead of us, and again we scratch the surface, and I really appreciate the time and commitment from this group and really appreciate your support.