

## Eliminate Racism 815

**Vision:** Rockford is a community where everyone feels valued

**Mission:** Eliminate Racism in Rockford

**Quarterly Reports:** April 2020

**Criminal Justice Team:** Meets 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of month at Pilgrim Baptist Church, 1709 S. Central Ave. at 4:545-5:45 pm

**Mission:** To eradicate the effects of institutional racism in our criminal justice system through advocacy, direct action and education.

**Goal #1:** The City of Rockford will create a racially diverse Civilian Review Board by 2021 made up of non-police members to provide input related to investigations resulting from police action.

**Goal #2:** To reduce by 20%, racial disparities in stops by the Rockford Police between African Americans, Latinos and White people by 2021.

**Goal #3:** The Winnebago County Court system will create and implement a Restorative Justice Court which includes additional support for low-level offenders to help them become productive citizens of the Rockford area by 2021.

Due to the Covid-19 Crisis, this team has not met lately.

**Economic Opportunities Team:** Meets 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month at Rundalls, 413 Stiles Parkway @ 6:00 pm

**Team Mission:** To reduce economic discrimination and promote equitable opportunities through education, social action, and collaboration with governmental, public, and private organizations (economic discrimination, as defined in Wikipedia, "is discrimination based on economic factors. These factors can include job availability, wages, the prices and/or availability of goods and services, and the amount of capital investment funding available to minorities for business.")

**Goal:** To collaborate and advocate with government, business and private organizations for the promotion of recreational, entertainment, and small business in Southwest Rockford with the result of action by January 1, 2022.

The Economic Opportunities Action Team met twice during the quarter (January 28 and February 25). The March meeting was canceled because of the Coronavirus lockdown. During this time the Team changed the goal from "the creation of a Southwest River Development Coalition" to "collaborate and advocate with governmental, business, and private organizations for the promotion of recreational, entertainment, and small business in Southwest Rockford."

This was done because it was discovered that the Region 1 Planning Council already had a coalition of agencies working on development in Rockford which included Southwest Rockford. A member of the Team has been attending these meetings and has requested that Eliminate Racism 815 become a non-voting member of the group (voting member organizations are limited to the founding members, all

others are non-voting members. We will continue to attend the meetings and advocate for development in Southwest Rockford, especially along the Rock River and the South Main Street corridor.

There is also new life in the effort to have RVC build an Area Tech Center in Coleman Village in Southwest Rockford. The Board of Directors of ER 815 has been communicating with the Rock Valley College Trustees and the Mayor about this. In addition, some citizens, including several City of Rockford Alderman, have formed a group called "Rockford Area Citizens for Transparent and Accountable Government" and initiated communication with RVC through a lawyer.

We will meet again for the May meeting via Zoom. If you are interested, contact Dick Rundall at dickrundall@gmail.com.

### **Education Action Team: Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of month @ Pilgrim Baptist Church, 1703 S. Central Ave at 4:30**

**Mission: To be passionate advocates of equity-driven policies and practices in the Rockford Public Schools (RPS205) so that all students will be prepared for social and academic success.**

**Goal 1:** To increase to 20% People of Color (POC)- especially African- Americans and Hispanic- in all levels of RPS205: administration, faculty, staff, and board member by the 2020-2021 school year. By the school year 2025-2026, have percentages of African American and Hispanic administration, staff, and board members match the percentage of African Americans and Hispanic students within the system.

1. Meeting with Supt. Jarrett, Dec 18, 2019. During this meeting, hiring progress reviewed, especially in light of diversity goal RPS205 continues to have a 6.2% deficit for RPS administration, 13.2% deficit RPS teachers (REA), and a 5% deficit for RPS Board of Education.

2. Short term and long term recruiting strategies were also discussed, including mentoring, pairing, support and incentives offered to People of Color recruits. Other recruiting tactics were also discussed, such as developing a more interesting FB profile of Rockford that would appeal to People of Color, The Grow Your Own Program with Rockford University Pathway, regional college relationships, and the Alliances/Aspire Program with paraprofessionals and parents of color. Additional collaborations included with the National Equity Project and the National Alliance of Black School Educators.

3. Presentations: Ronald Simmons participated in a presentation through the Rock Valley College Center for Learning in Retirement on March 3, 2020 titled "Valuing Each Student in RPS 205: Discovery and Solution." A second presentation planned for the United Methodist Women's Group has been rescheduled due to COVID-19, new date TBD.

4. A meeting with REA was held. They agreed to contact the minority representative for the teachers to ask if support could be put in place. The REA has not reported to us the status of this initiative.

**Goal 2:** To ensure that RPS205 policies and resources, including teachers, counselors, supplies, and technology, are equitable, based on the needs of students in the school and measured by the state required assessment data and the district discipline data. This goal shall be met by 2020-2021 school year.

On March 6, 2020 the Education Team met with Dr. Jarrett and his leadership team at Pilgrim Baptist Church to discuss Goal 2. After a report from Rockford Public School on actions they have been taking related to recruiting African American and Hispanic teachers and administrators, the focus was on Finance and on Discipline.

**Finance:** The district has improved their funding formula starting with the 2019-2020 school to address the disparity of spending per pupil between different school. They acknowledge they still have a distance to go but are moving in the right direction. The disparity range of \$\$ spent is evidenced by the data that shows \$15,816 per pupil is spent at Rolling Green and only \$9,531 is spent at Barbour per student. We will continue to monitor this data and continue to ask questions related to the disparity. RPS did receive \$11.6 million additional funding from the State of Illinois in Evidence-based "Adequacy" dollars because we are a poor school district. Of \$11.6 million, the schools were given \$4.4 million of those dollars. The new funding formula called "Student Based Budgeting" that RPS has developed attempts to address the disparity of funding between the schools and hopes to get additional dollars to our most needy students. We continue to ask how the additional dollars are spent and were told that principals chose to spend \$146,500 on professional development, \$169,000 on technology, 3.5 Parent Support Specialist, 7 additional Behavioral Intervention Specialists, 4 instruction Coaches. At middle school \$560,000 was spent on Teaming, \$528,000 was spent on HS Purity and \$175,500 was spent on tutoring. We asked about how many schools now have "Multi-classroom Leaders and we were told that Riverdahl, Washington, and Constance Lane schools have them this year. Next year the district hopes to have 18 "Multi-classroom Leaders in place.

**Discipline:** There continues to be huge disparity in the Discipline of African-American students as compared to Hispanic and White students. While 30.6% of the students in RPS are African-American 53% of in-school suspensions, 59% of out-of-school suspensions, 63% of incidents recorded, 56% of expulsions, 54% of Expulsions in Abeyance (EIA), and 62% of arrests are African-American students. We ask "Why?" and "What is the plan to address this disparity?" Many of us attended the public hearings that the district is required to hold each year related to the Discipline Code. We also attended the same meetings last school year. We continue to ask for the focus to become one of support for the struggling students, rather than a punitive approach. So far, they have changed a few headings in the Code Book but the practice of "punish, punish, punish has not changed. We also have concerns about the discipline data that is reported to the State of Illinois. We are told that the State asks for data to be reported by combining all students of color rather than by sub-groups. That becomes very misleading because there is not disparity in Hispanic discipline data so by combining with African-American data it casts a veil over the truth of the African American disparity. Linda Zuba and Ann Rundall met on March 11, 2020 with a group of lawyers from Prairie State Legal. They are interested in doing pro bono legal assistance for students who have been put up for expulsion and EIA. We will continue to work together to create a system that can assist families who cannot afford their own legal counsel.

**Goal 3:** Students of Color (SOC) - especially African-American and Hispanic - **will be encouraged** to enroll in and **be enrolled** in Honors and AP classes and will receive the support they need to be

academically successful. By 2020-2021 school year, SOC enrollment will have increased by 25% within these advanced curricular programs; these students will have received a final grade of "C" or better.

Members of the Goal 3 committee believe:

1. There must be a district-wide Students of Color recruitment strategy.
2. There must be a district-wide strategy for helping parents of Students of Color to understand the benefits of AP classes for their children.
3. There must be a district wide AP teacher recruitment strategy that establishes criteria for teachers most likely to succeed in AP classes with a diverse student population, most importantly, SoC. This strategy should identify teachers who are culturally sensitive and have strong relationship building skills and then support these teachers through a variety of methods, including professional development opportunities.
4. There must be a district-wide AP support strategy for Students of Color that acknowledges and meets the unique restraints the students face, including academic and socio-economic.
5. RPS205 should develop community-based involvement/support for Students of Color AP enrollment.

**Information provided by RPS205:**

Students enrolled in AP courses by Race/Ethnicity:

African-American 62% increase from 2011-2019 (126 to 204)  
 Hispanic/Latino 220% increase from 2011-2019 (122 to 391)

Number of students passing AP exams with a 3 or higher:

White	403 (2011)	522 (2017)	542 (2018)
African-Am	105 (2011)	98 (2017)	107 (2018)
Hispanic/Lat	121 (2011)	341 (2017)	355 (2019)
Total # of students:	762 (2011)	1055 (2017)	1211 (2018)

% of students achieving a score of 3-5 (passing) on AP exams:

	2011	2018	2019
White	785, 61.1%	1143 72%	1197 63.9%
AA	158 5.2 %	168	169 2.8%
H/L	209 11.4%	445	623 15%

Total # of exams:

White 1427 41.4%  
 AA 2177 39%  
 H/L 2457 39.8%

Other information provided by RPS2-5:

Recruitment: \$100k to recruit underrepresented groups with external partner Equal Opportunity Schools. Student and teachers surveys and data analysis will be used. Administration will assign students to AP classes who have demonstrated academic success.

AP Student support: School early warning system will be used to identify students in need of academic support. AP tutoring and Kahn Academy online tutorials will be used to provide this support. Course

expectations, syllabi outlines, class expectations, and sources of academic support will be clearly communicated.

AP Teacher Training: AP teachers will be encouraged to attend and participate in AP summer institutes, annual one-day workshops, professional learning community meetings with other AP teachers, Goggle classrooms for AP teacher connections and to seek support from a College Board Representative.

In preparation for our June 11 meeting with Dr. Jarrett, the team continues to read and discuss relevant research, including an expanded investigation into models of support for SoC AP students.

We are also interested in inviting Louie F. Rodriguez and Will Greer, authors of "(UN) Expected Scholars" to Rockford. They are both examples of under-represented students who participated in AP classes and went on to have a career in higher education.

**Corona Virus:** March 13, 2020 was the last day of school because of the Corona Virus! Since then all Eliminate Racism face to face meetings have been suspended until further notice! The school district has set up a system to provide food to families. When the program was first announced, we discovered they had 3 pick-up sites on the Eastside of Rockford (Guilford, East and Flinn) and one site on the Westside of Rockford (Kennedy). We quickly contacted Dr. Jarrett and he quickly asked his team to add sites to the Westside. Each site also had only a 45 minute window when people could pick up food and we asked that they expand the time and they added 30 minutes so now there is a one hour and 15 minute window. The other issue arose when they started distributing Chromebooks to students. They first surveyed parents and the survey did not allow for a parent to say they had zero technology at their house. They quickly fixed that and did another survey that worked much better. After distributing Chromebooks for 2 weeks, there are still families who have not received a Chromebook. The other problem has been Internet connection and the location of "Hotspots" in the city. There are parts of Rockford that have no "Hotspots". The district is still working with Comcast/Xfinity to solve these issues.

**Relationship Action Team:** Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of month at Pilgrim Baptist Church, 1703 S. Central Ave @ 6:00pm

**Mission:** to radically alter divisive social patterns by building genuine relationships across racial, religious, class and cultural differences

**Goal #1:** To partner with the Rockford Public Library on the subject of race. Organize, oversee and facilitate numerous facilitated meetings with the library staff on the subject of race relations by May 2020, called "Courageous Conversations" by library.

We have had a great experience with the library staff, at first finding some resistance to this outside group coming in to "fix" or "teach" us, esp. when we started June 10, 2019. As months progressed, relationships grew, fears diminished, and both facilitators and library staff began to really look forward to our 90 minutes together. As people told their stories, we all connected, across generations, and cultures and also even between administrators and regular staff of the library. That was a gulf I didn't anticipate. Then we were able to meet in groups with both "pay scales" and diverse educational backgrounds. We were able to be on schedule until March 16 when we had to postpone our meetings due to corona virus warnings. We will not meet in April and probably not in May when our year commitment for the year would be over. All is postponed.

**Goal #2:** To create a model process that can be used with diverse faith groups and other organizations to develop more communication and understanding and to facilitate a partnership between two diverse churches by June 2020.

There are some initiatives being explored with the action team's churches and other churches/religious groups, but some things are on hold due to virus. An unexpected initiative arose from a dream in which I experienced MLK Jr. birthday on Jan 20 as a movement, rather than a memorial that followed into February, and on from there. A song came out of that dream and then a "Do the Dream" band/ singers followed. Band was diverse like Rockford and included Dorothy Paige-Turner, Linda Zuba, George Davis, Michelle Markley, Sallyann Roberts, David Stocker, and Jim Roberts.

**Song is : Come-unity/ The People of the River** (jim roberts, david stocker)

- 1) "We are the people of the river      We come from many lands  
to build a real community.      Many voices, many hands Many cultures, many lands.

Chorus follows each verse: "Community, Come-unity ... Comunidad, Ven Ven"

- 2) When the rivers run together      We see what we can be  
to live as one great family      Rivers running free (2x)
- 3) Let's take down all the WALLS between      Walls keep us apart.  
and recognize all our relatives      with EYES within our heart (2x)

Ceremony based on MLK teachings, get up, lock arms, look at each other in 3 distinct and different ways and stay together for last verses...

- 4) Say goodbye (Goodbye) to the old ways      This is our brand new start  
All our relations stand with us NOW.      Come , into our heart (2x)
- 5) So meet me at the river      To sing this new old song  
and raise our voice TOGETHER now      Been divided too long (2x)

We went out to many groups in the city and brought this song and our conversation about connecting and diversity through Jan and Feb, ran into difficulty in March with virus. The arts are another way to bring the relationships we are wanting.

**Goal #3:** To explore a training experience with the Milwaukee Zeidler training Center.

We have had three of these trainings in Rockford and have 43 trained facilitators

We were unable to meet as an action team on Tues. April 7 due to virus, but we will meet on Tues May 5, probably via Zoom. We want to especially thank Rebecca Quirk for her work in setting up the website for Eliminating Racism. It was part of our original agenda but she really put it together. Also we must thank all the facilitators who faithfully and artfully showed up for the "Courageous Conversations" with the Rockford Public Library staff. We have a talented and delightful group in Eliminating Racism. It is a pleasure to work with them all.      jim roberts