

## Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, January 2018

**#TogetherWeCan** - *Inspire, Prepare, and Engage* has been Plainville Community Schools' mantra for the 2017-18 school year. As we entered our second year of the newly revised Strategic Plan, the Plainville Community Schools' Equity Task Force used information gathered from the Diversity Survey to plan and organize learning experiences for faculty and staff members. Our Strategic Plan invited us all to reflect upon and consider how our beliefs, practices, and decisions impact students' growth, development, and academic achievement. The survey results revealed the following: 51% of those surveyed recognized the growth in diversity within our schools; 56% feel Plainville schools prepare students to interact in a diverse society. In our effort to provide support for faculty and staff, Professional Development (PD) was designed to address their desire to learn more about the cultures represented within our student population, create a more inclusive and reflective curriculum, build educator capacity around strategies for educating English language learners, and how to use cultural knowledge to increase learning.

The November professional development day proved to be an exciting and engaging one! Taking the lead from our survey results, a day of exploring biases and developing awareness was planned. The morning session was hosted by CREC Specialist, PHS graduate, keynote speaker Gerald Hairston EdD. His message reflected on growing up in Plainville and attending Plainville Community Schools. "Plainville is a special place. It has its own way...its own feel..." Gerald discussed how Plainville's culture influenced his growth, development, and sense of belonging. His message encouraged attendees to embrace the "hard parts of education, celebrate the contributions of diversity in the classroom, and to proceed with faith and grace."

Participants shared the following reflections about the day:

*“I learned to be more aware of children and their actions and why they may act the way they do. I also walked away understanding that every person has a bias that they may not know they have. This will help my professional practice by continuing to love the kids and spread awareness.”*

*“The small group provided me with the greatest amount of learning. We had very rich discussions on what being culturally responsive in the classroom looks like. It was a nice opportunity to work with teachers from all the schools in the district! This will impact my professional practice as I continue to be aware of the cultural differences of my students and celebrate those differences within my instruction daily.”*

Following November’s PD, 25 educators engaged in a book discussion; *In the Country we Love* by Diane Guerrero. The group discussed how immigration status affects the daily lives of students. Participants shared past and present personal experiences of self and ancestors. The book discussion concluded with a multicultural potluck dinner and discussion about current immigration laws lead by attorney Aleksandar Troyb Esq., from the law firm, Benjamin, Gold & Troyb, P.C.

Over the next 2 years, faculty and staff will enjoy additional learning opportunities to develop Cultural Competence and deepen their understanding of various cultures, instructional strategies, and practices designed to increase learning and academic achievement. Students will also have the opportunity to expand their knowledge of various representative cultures and strategies for engaging with members of the community. These experiences will incorporate the definition developed by Plainville, based on the National Association of Social Workers:

*“Cultural competence refers to the **process** by which individuals and systems **respond respectfully** and **effectively** to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other diversity factors in a manner that **recognizes**, **affirms**, and **values** the **worth** of individuals, families and communities and protects and preserves the **dignity** of each.”*

We invite you to join us as we continue through this wonderfully exciting journey into Culturally Responsive Education as it enriches us and prepares us all for life in the 21st century and a global society.