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## EQUITY MATTERS

In 2019, Staunton City Schools launched an Equity First Fund, thanks to generous, unsolicited donations from individual and corporate donors totaling more than \$125,000. The creation of the fund was a significant milestone in the school division's strategic, ongoing work on diversity and inclusion that began in 2017. Since then, Staunton City Schools has been actively seeking ways to ensure educational equity for students and an inclusive environment for all who learn and work in our schools.

The school division's work has been expertly guided over the last three years by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC), a Richmond-based nonprofit dedicated to addressing prejudices in all forms, to improve academic achievement, increase workplace productivity and enhance local trust. VCIC is providing continuing diversity and inclusion training for faculty and staff and guidance for Staunton City Schools' first-ever equity plan.

## EQUITY VS. EQUALITY

People often use the terms equity and equality interchangeably, but they are not synonymous. Practicing equality in our schools means treating everyone the same, giving every student the same experience without consideration of each individual's needs. But practicing equity means providing every student with support and opportunities to be successful, based on each individual's characteristics and needs.

Equity in education means working to remove barriers to educational success, particularly overcoming a historical legacy of discrimination, marginalization and lack of investment in students based on race, ethnicity, disability and socioeconomic status. Staunton City Schools is working diligently to overcome institutional barriers to success and create an equitable environment for every student.

## HOW WE HELP

The Equity First Fund provides a monetary resource, separate from the annual budget, that allows the school division to address issues of equity for students and staff immediately.

So far, the Equity First Fund has been used to:

- acquire more than 600 multi-cultural books for elementary school libraries that reflect the diverse social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the schools' populations;
- provide after-school tutors to middle students that require additional individualized exposure to learning;
- pay out-of-pocket fees for advanced placement, PSAT exams, dual enrollment courses, and gifted and vocational programs for high school students;
- counsel and mentor at-risk youth and trauma victims;
- address bullying by sending teams of students and educators to "Upstander" training courses;
- provide access to technology for students and families who lack the resources, including refurbished laptops and internet hotspots so that parents and students can keep up with schoolwork; and
- secure a continuing partnership with VCIC to provide next-level diversity and inclusion training for staff as well as the development of an equity plan for the school division.

## YOU CAN HELP

Your contributions to Staunton City Schools' Equity First Fund are needed and appreciated to continue this important work. If you have an interest in furthering our ongoing efforts to advance equity and inclusion in Staunton's schools, please contact Superintendent Dr. Garrett Smith or the Staunton City School Board.

Dr. Smith continues to evaluate student needs with school principals and executive staff, encouraging them to propose equity projects as needed for review and possible approval.

Donations to the Equity First Fund are reserved in a special revenue account by Staunton City Schools and may be tax-deductible. While we cannot confirm the tax-deductibility of any individual donation, donors will receive a signed letter acknowledging receipt of their donation to the public school system. You may contribute anonymously, or we can assist in spreading the word for those who wish to share news of their donation.