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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 fund's creation 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 over the last four years has been expertly guided by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC). VCIC is 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 ongoing diversity and inclusion training for faculty and staff and guidance for Staunton City Schools' first equity plan, which is scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2021.

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 considering 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 (scheduled for 2021);
- 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 vital work.

Donations made to public school programs are generally tax-deductible, and donors will receive a signed letter acknowledging their donation for tax purposes. You may contribute anonymously, or we can help spread the word for those who wish to share news of their gift.

If you are interested 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 at gsmith@staunton.k12.va.us or 540.332.3920.

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.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT STAUNTON CITY SCHOOLS' VISION FOR EQUITY AT
WWW.STAUNTON.K12.VA.US/EQUITY**