

## **Diversity Discussion from Superintendent Parent Network Meeting**

The topic at the December 18, 2007, Superintendent Parent Network, (SPN) meeting was diversity in our schools and community. As the Long Range Plan is implemented, the district will continue to initiate discussions about the diversity of its student population.

Our district's mission statement reflects the ongoing commitment to acknowledging the importance of diversity:

### **Mission Statement**

***United with parents and the community, the Wauwatosa School District delivers an outstanding education that equips and inspires our students to conquer their challenges now and in the future.***

-- Adopted by the Wauwatosa School Board Jan. 22, 2007

### **Belief Statements**

***We believe in respecting and promoting diversity.***

***We believe that positive relationships are a foundation of successful schools.***

***We believe in continuous improvement.***

***We believe in excellence.***

***We believe there is an essential unity between the community and its school district.***

***We believe all students can learn and excel.***

***We believe everyone has the right to emotional and physical safety.***

-- Adopted by the Wauwatosa School Board Jan. 22, 2007

At the SPN meeting, there was a presentation from a district social worker and input from our state PTA's representative. Below are some of the points that could be used for discussion with parents or other community members in your schools.

- Research and statistics were shared, illustrating how the number of Wauwatosa student residents who are identified as "non-white" has increased over the past 10 years.
- The presentation and discussion was an outgrowth of a long-range planning committee, and in response to our district's "over-representation of non-whites in special education" notification (per DPI), and the need to better serve our student population.
- Two definitions were shared:
  - “Diversity” in the true sense of the word refers to dimensions of diversity including those protected classes as well as other individual and group

differences in regard to preferences, manners, values, etc. However, for the purpose of our conversations we are addressing cultural diversity/competency.

"Cultural competency" is one's ability to interact and communicate effectively with people of different cultures. A person's knowledge of different cultural practices and attitude toward cultural differences contribute to cultural competency. Enhancing or developing one's cultural competence can lead to a better understanding of, and more effective communication with individuals of different cultures.

- The research shows that when looking at any achievement gaps, race is a key factor in determining academic growth, as are socio-economic or other factors.
- Curriculum work is underway to ensure that diversity/cultural competency is not just a unit or a day or week event. It needs to be incorporated in our curriculum throughout the district in all grades.
- We need to recruit minority teaching staff and male elementary teachers. As a predominantly homogenous staff, this needs to continue to be bravely discussed and explored to benefit our students and prepare them for the future.

Two valuable websites were referred to: [www.understandingrace.org](http://www.understandingrace.org) and [www.teachingtolerance.org](http://www.teachingtolerance.org) and a reading list was distributed.