

Equity Ambassador Events

On Oct. 26, the HCPS Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity sponsored its first Equity Ambassador event for the 2022-23 school year. These divisionwide events have student and teacher representation from every HCPS high school. The event took place at Deep Run Park. The EDO Office opened the event by welcoming everyone, reviewing the Equity Ambassador mission statement and highlighting updates about programming and logistics. The theme for the event was “Data: The Power of Evidence-Based Action.” Following this, students began the event by completing team-building activities that emphasized the introduction and building of connections among themselves and peers from other schools. The students then returned to their school-based tables and delved into the power of data and how it impacts and reflects their school community. Tiffany Lewis and Deanna Fierro from the EDO Office introduced students to VDOE climate surveys. Students were guided in ways to approach the data, possible underlying factors and how the surveys shape the course of our school division. Students then worked in their school groups to discuss the division’s areas of growth, possible solutions and how their lived experiences related to the survey results. The event concluded with the Equity Ambassadors discussing possible ways the events they will implement within their school community during the 22-23 school year might improve on these areas of weakness while promoting an environment of equity and belonging.

On Dec. 1, the EDO Office held its second, divisionwide Equity Ambassadors event, with the theme “Community Engagement and Volunteerism.” Students heard about the importance of community engagement and ways they can get involved in their communities beyond school organizations and clubs. The rest of the session involved students volunteering their own time and labor to improve upon our community. The EDO Office collaborated with the Henrico Christmas Mother and HCPS’ Department of Student Support and Wellness to make this event a reality. A third of the students spent their morning in the Henrico Christmas Mother warehouse. They helped set up the warehouse for clients to shop, made signs, sorted food donations and made gift bags for seniors and disabled adults. The ambassadors who were not at the warehouse split their time between making cards, putting together thank-you bags for nurses, and assembling grief kits. The holiday cards will be distributed to veterans and the elderly. The thank-you bags will be given to nurses at HCPS’ Title I schools. The grief kits will be used by the Department of Student Support and Wellness. These deliverables will provide recognition and a sense of belonging to those who are less fortunate or may be going through a time of crisis during this holiday season.

The Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity Book Clubs

The “Windows and Mirrors Book Club,” sponsored by HCPS’ EDO Office, held its first meetings recently. The books were selected based on student interest, gathered via an online survey. The books for the 2022-23 school year are:

- “Tell Me Who You Are: Sharing Our Stories of Race, Culture, and Identity” by Winona Guo and Priya Vulchi.
- “Backfield Boys: A Football Mystery in Black and White” by John Feinstein
- “Same Family, Different Colors: Confronting Colorism in America’s Diverse Families” by Lori Tharps

All three books focus on race, culture and identity in the U.S. The book clubs provide students with a safe and inclusive environment for approaching and discussing these topics. The voluntary book club is open to all HCPS students. Permission from parents or guardians is required.

For the first semester, book study participants were asked to participate in an asynchronous guided reading experience that included discussion boards and assigned readings from their book and other supplemental materials such as articles and videos. At least one virtual group meeting is planned for November, December, January, February and March. During the second semester, specifically March and April, participants will complete their “Activism Challenge.” They will create a podcast or write a personal narrative that combines ideas from the book club with their lived experiences and outside research on an activist of the student’s choosing.

HBCU Tour

In November, the Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity, in response to student requests and in support of college enrollment and career readiness efforts, offered an HBCU College Tour to Hampton University and Norfolk State University. Students from high schools across Henrico County engaged in face-to-face question-and-answer dialogues with college representatives. Many students in HCPS Black student unions and African American history and literature courses attended. The trip garnered positive feedback from students, with one student stating, "I thought this was a really good experience and I would definitely do it again."