

Green Book Initiative

STATUS: On Notice

Findings Report for Joe Shoemaker School

Overview

Joe Shoemaker School has been assigned the **status “On Notice”** under the Green Book Initiative. While the school demonstrates strengths in safety, cleanliness, and general commitment to social-emotional learning, the review reveals significant systemic gaps in inclusivity, equity, and representation, with an emphasis concerning Black students and families. The report identifies recurring patterns of cultural invisibility, lack of representation, and superficial engagement with Black identity and history.

Findings Report:

Curriculum Inclusivity and Representation:

Findings: Joe Shoemaker School's curriculum for 4th grade, and more broadly through its EL Education model, emphasizes character education, social-emotional learning, and civic responsibility. While this framework includes explorations of identity and justice themes (e.g., 19th Amendment, human rights), the curriculum largely reflects Eurocentric narratives. For instance, the 4th-grade American Revolution unit centers Patriot and Loyalist perspectives (both colonial) and omits Indigenous, African, and enslaved peoples' resistance and experiences. The 5th-grade curriculum introduces Black representation primarily through sports, furthering the problematic trend of limiting Black excellence to athletics. The required texts used in the curriculum are almost exclusively authored by white individuals.

Impact: Black students are left without consistent academic affirmation of their history, brilliance, and legacy. When Blackness is only introduced in the context of sports or struggle, it reduces students' sense of identity to narrow, stereotypical frames. Furthermore, all students, regardless of racial background, miss out on the opportunity to engage with a truthful, expansive, and multi-faceted American narrative. This perpetuates erasure and undermines the cultural competence that the school claims to value.

Empathic Listening Session #7, #12, and #13: Black students and families reported reactions to some of the readings and the class engagement, advising feeling uneasy about the content and the narratives being presented to the students. When staff were asked about how Black people fit into the curriculum, individuals interviewed recall being told, "We don't get into that until later in the year," and explicitly recalled that Black figures were not prevalent until there were discussions or presentations about sports. This left students feeling confused and disengaged.

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Recommendations:

- Conduct a full audit of curriculum materials to assess representation by race, gender, and culture.
- Mandate that each expedition include at least one central text authored by a Black writer or feature Black protagonists outside of sports or oppression.
- Incorporate African American history and Indigenous resistance into units like the American Revolution (referencing website details)
- Prioritize reading content featuring local and national Black authors and scholars.
- Provide teachers with PD on culturally responsive curriculum design and critical literacy.

Equity in Disciplinary Actions:

Findings: The school has embedded restorative practices as the foundation for behavior management, emphasizing relationships, accountability, and community healing. Their “Peace Feet” model teaches students to solve interpersonal problems independently, and more complex issues involve adult mediation through structured restorative processes. The school culture explicitly avoids punitive discipline and encourages empathy-based responses.

Impact: This approach promotes a psychologically safe learning environment, particularly for Black students who are historically over-disciplined in schools. It allows space for children to remain in the classroom, access instruction, and be supported holistically. While no race-specific discipline data was shared, the framework signals positive intent and a compassionate school climate. Community trust is tarnished because the data is not transparent, so this institution is at risk and vulnerable to a breach of trust, which our Committee finds to be an inevitability if not remedied.

Empathic Listen Session #22: A Black student caused a disruption with another classmate during project work. Rather than being sent to the office or suspended, they participated in a Peace Feet circle where they apologized, repaired the relationship, and built trust with the peer. The student returned to class, and parents reported that all parties felt heard and supported.

Recommendations:

- Publish disaggregated discipline data annually to ensure accountability and transparency.
- Develop family workshops explaining the restorative practices model to deepen trust.
- Train staff on how to apply RP with cultural humility, especially in cases involving racial microaggressions or harm.
- Add explicit anti-racism training to the behavioral response toolkit.
- Offer student-led circles for peer accountability and leadership development.

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Staff and Leadership Representation:

Findings: The leadership and staff list provided in the family handbook reflects minimal racial diversity, and there is no indication of a deliberate strategy to hire, retain, and promote Black educators or administrators. Furthermore, all but one of the listed community partners are white-led organizations, which reinforces a dominant cultural perspective in both curriculum development, enrichment activities, and community engagement.

Impact: The lack of Black leadership and culturally affirming community partners creates a learning environment where Black students rarely see themselves reflected in authority, mentorship, or enrichment contexts. This absence can limit aspirations and make families feel disconnected from the decision-making structures of the school. It may also lead to cultural misunderstandings that affect everything from learning styles to behavior interpretation.

Recommendations:

- Develop a Black educator recruitment and retention plan in partnership with DPS and local HBCUs or Black education networks.
- Incorporate more Black-led partners and mentors into academic and extracurricular programs.
- Establish advisory roles for Black staff and community leaders to shape decision-making.
- Host Black Teacher and Leader Panels so students can learn from professionals who look like them.

Empathic Listening Session #1, #11, #17, #20: Black families who attended parent-teacher conferences reported discussing and expressing disdain that every adult they interacted with in these spaces was white. Students mentioned they've never had a Black teacher. When students and families inquired about any plans to implement Black mentors, teachers, and programs, they were told, "not right now, but we're working on it." Three of these families interviewed reported leaving the school, citing that their cultural presence was missing from the school experience.

Policies and Practices:

Findings: The school handbook references DPS's anti-discrimination policies, Title IX protections, and outlines processes for addressing grievances. The tone suggests compliance with district standards, but there is little in the way of proactive anti-racism training, targeted equity initiatives, or transparent reporting mechanisms specific to the school.

Impact: The policies appear adequate on paper, but the absence of culturally relevant practices has rendered them hollow in moments of real conflict. Without a school-level equity lens or

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proactive stance on anti-Blackness, microaggressions or systemic bias are going unaddressed until matters escalate.

Recommendations:

- Develop a school-specific anti-racism policy that complements the district's and centers the needs of Black students and families.
- Create visible reporting systems (QR codes, anonymous forms) for families to share equity concerns.
- Host bi-annual equity town halls to share progress and invite collaboration.
- Mandate racial equity training at the school level for all staff annually.

Empathic Listening Session #2, #3, #14, #17, #21: A Black student experienced disruption in the classroom by one of their white counterparts, which was witnessed and reported by other students. Instead of support being offered to the Black student, they were labeled as the aggressor and the disruptor. When the family attempted to engage with the school regarding concerns about the incident and the classification, they felt the leadership acknowledged the concern and followed district protocol. While the family appreciated the response, they advised that the support felt very disconnected, their voices felt dismissed and passed off to the District, and they were left wondering why there was no training in place to prevent this kind of labeling in the first place. Resolution was never reached, and the issue seemingly faded into the background as the year ended. There was never any follow-up.

Support Systems:

Findings: Shoemaker emphasizes student wellness and character development through crew sessions and restorative practices. However, there is no mention of affinity spaces, culturally competent counselors, or mentorship specifically for Black students. The support system is holistic but not culturally targeted.

Impact: Without targeted support, Black students report feeling disconnected from emotional and academic support services. They are hesitant to seek help or share personal challenges due to not feeling culturally safe or understood. This contributes to disparities in mental health outcomes, achievement, and school connectedness.

Recommendations:

- Hire or partner with Black mental health professionals to provide identity-affirming counseling.
- Launch a Black Student Affinity Group or leadership club to build community.
- Implement a culturally responsive mentorship program for Black students.
- Survey Black students regularly about their school experience and support needs.

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Empathic Listening Session #5, #17, #20, #24: Students reported experiencing anxiety about racial bullying and were referred to school staff and leadership. The staff deployed general SEL strategies but didn't address race at all. The students and families felt misunderstood and stopped engaging, while the families had to seek outside resources to fill the gap.

Physical Environment:

Findings: Shoemaker's environment is clean, organized, and promotes safety. However, there is no visible affirmation of Black culture. No artwork, quotes, posters, or displays celebrating Black history or current leaders. The environment is neutral, not inclusive or representative.

Impact: A culturally sterile environment may make Black students feel peripheral. If they don't see themselves on the walls or in the culture of the building, the message is clear: excellence, leadership, and belonging are not tied to their identity. This is particularly detrimental as the curriculum does not offer any sense of affirmation of their belonging. This invisibility damages confidence and engagement.

Recommendations:

- Install Black history and culture installations (e.g., mural walls, timelines, leader portraits).
- Feature Black student work prominently in hallways and shared spaces.
- Celebrate Black holidays and heritage months with visual storytelling throughout the school.
- Allow students to co-design visual representations of their identities and cultures.

Empathic Listening Session #3, #9, #13, #16, #17, #18, #20, #23, #24: A Black parent talked about walking the hallways each time they visited the school and said they saw that the walls were surrounded by posters and displays that centered white historical figures and narratives. As February approached, she noticed a few new decorations were up (images of Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Barack Obama) taped hastily to a bulletin board. The parent reported that by March 1st, the displays were gone, and the visual displays at the school went back to "business as usual".

Students interviewed about their opportunities to provide ideas for decoration and meaningful celebration of their culture advised that they were never asked about what they thought should be included in the Black History celebration. They also reported that there is very limited discussion in class about current Black leaders, resistance movements, or cultural contributions. As these students did a turn and talk in this session, Committee members observed that they seemed to quietly wonder why their culture only seems to matter once a year, and even then, only through the lens of a few safe and sanitized figures they didn't help choose.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, while the school demonstrates a commitment to maintaining a safe, clean, and accessible environment for all students, there is a clear and undeniable revelation of deep flaws in its approach to inclusivity and justice. The incident, which sparked the need for rapid response, underscores the inadequacy of existing measures to protect Black students from harm, both emotional and institutional. The lack of sustained, meaningful engagement with Black families and communities, superficial representation of Black culture, and the absence of tailored support for Black students' unique needs contribute to a climate where these students may not feel fully seen, heard, or valued. Despite visible safety measures, both physical and emotional security for Black students, staff, families, and the community require greater attention, particularly in addressing racial discrimination and bias.

For the school to truly live up to its stated goals of inclusivity and excellence, a more intentional and holistic approach is needed. We recommend that the school gain insight into how its approach can be one that not only acknowledges but actively works to dismantle the systems of harm that perpetuate such inequities, consistently honoring the lived experiences, contributions, and needs of the Black Excellence in its school community.

Green Book Initiative		Your Status: Exodus Status	Instructions
Name of Institution	Fox Ridge Middle School		Enter the score for each category based on the detailed assessments in the respective sheets. The overall score and recommendation will be manually calculated based on the total score.
Criteria	Score	Scoring Key	
Curriculum Inclusivity and Representation	2.9	5	Exemplary
Equity in Disciplinary Actions	2.5	4	Above Average
Staff and Leadership Representation	2.2	3	Average
Engagement with Black Families and Communities	3	2	Below Average
Treatment and Involvement of Black School Board Members	N/A	1	Poor
Use for Governance ONLY			
Policies and Practices	2.7		
Support Systems	2.4		
Physical Environment	4.3		
Score		2.9	
In our comprehensive assessment process, each category will be meticulously evaluated using a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where a rating of 1 signifies inadequate support for the thriving of Black students, while a rating of 5 represents exceptional support. Through this methodical approach, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the school's safety and inclusivity for Black students. By averaging the scores across all categories, we will generate total scores, offering a comprehensive overview of the school's performance in fostering an environment conducive to the success of Black students.			
Green Book Schools/Governance will be expected to achieve a minimum score of 4.5, indicating exemplary support and commitment to inclusivity.			
Schools/Governance On Notice will be held to a minimum score of 3.0, ensuring that even institutions requiring improvement maintain a baseline level of support.			
Exodus Schools/Governance will be capped at a maximum score of 3.0, reflecting the need for significant enhancements to better support the thriving of Black students. This scoring system enables us to identify strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for targeted interventions, ultimately fostering continuous progress towards equity and excellence.			