

# **Fairbanks Coalition Builders**

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*An executive summary of the implementation and progress of the Fairbanks Coalition Building team to promote respect for the diversity and dignity for all within the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District.*

**Introduction:** The Board's 2020-2025 Mission Statement articulates our district's purpose to *"...provide an excellent, equitable education in a safe, supportive environment."* This mission is further detailed through the District's core values, and supported by the strategic plan. Within the core values *"respect for the diversity and dignity of all"* is identified and the strategic plan has goals developed to specifically to address equity and inclusion:

EQUITY & INCLUSION: Provide equitable opportunities and an inclusive environment where all students and staff are respected and feel welcome, safe and supported.

2.1 Equity & Access: Close opportunity gaps while increasing student outcomes/achievement for all.

2.2 Diversity/Inclusion: Create a culture of belonging and inclusion for all, where issues of intolerance are addressed through education, awareness and civic responsibility.

One of the many ways the district is addressing these goals of supporting equity and inclusion is by partnering with the National Coalition Builders Institute, known and referred to as NCBI.

### **National Coalition Building Institute**

The National Coalition Building Institute is an internationally recognized non-profit leadership organization that provides training in diversity, equity, and inclusion. NCBI specifically works with community organizations, K-12 schools, college and university campuses, corporations, and law enforcement. The work of NCBI has reached multiple countries and numerous organizations, including the 'United States Department of Education's Gender Equity Expert Panel' which cited NCBI's work on college campuses as a national "best practice", awarding it the rating of "excellent" regarding educational significance, quality, usefulness, and replicability. When the FNSBSD sought training resources, NCBI rose to the top of our list as an organization able to provide the training and support our district desired to focus on equity, inclusion, race, and diversity.

### **Leadership for Diversity**

In October of 2018, the FNSBSD sent a team of 6 to attend the NCBI "Leadership for Diversity" workshop in Baltimore, MD. The workshop was unlike any training or conference experienced before by the members of the team, and statements like "life-changing" and "inspiring" were common refrains. The team, which included three administrators, one support staff, and a member of the

community, was introduced to the core beliefs of NCBI which propose that there is no place for shame or blame when trying to create an environment for honest conversations about diversity. Additionally NCBI teaches that in order to welcome diversity, you must listen to each other's stories to gain an understanding of the shared and unique experiences. Building awareness is the first step to creating empathy, and opening people's hearts and minds to welcome different perspectives. The most unique part of the whole workshop was that it wasn't a prepackaged program. NCBI was not selling videos, posters, or checklists promising quick solutions to complex social problems. Instead, the workshop focused on developing the skills present in every human to become a better listener and more capable of supporting diversity in everyday interactions.

### **Implementation Phase**

Local introduction of NCBI began in March of 2019, with two, one-day workshops hosted for district leadership, members from each employee group, and invited members of the public. The one-day "Welcoming Diversity - Exposure Workshops", held at Miguel's Mexican Restaurant, were led by Fae Brooks and Ira Baumgartner, both National NCBI Trainers. Brooks and Baumgartner met the local team in Baltimore and began planning the workshop design to meet our community needs in January of 2019. Between March 28 and March 29, 2019, 57 participants were introduced to the principles and engagement activities central to the NCBI philosophy. Once again, participants were moved by the experience and the seeds of an established local Fairbanks Coalition Builders groups were sewn.

*"It was unlike other diversity training I have been to. It really focused on the how we all fit together piece of it and I enjoyed that."*

*"Fairbanks needs this! We can do this and we can make a difference!"*

Immediately following the March workshops, plans began for additional workshops, train-the-trainer sessions, and the development of a local team that could continue this work. Within this timeframe, our district experienced several public setbacks around issues of race, gender equality and sexual orientation. These events made state and national headlines and made evident the hurt that lurks just under the surface of so many minority groups. As a district we determined that our community needed support to address these wounds and begin an honest dialogue to promote healing. Therefore we decided to add four Community Engagement Sessions to our NCBI schedule for the Fall of 2019 designed to help students, parents and the public express their feelings without hostility.

## Workshops & Community Engagement Sessions

The NCBI partnered with our local FCB team to develop a range of training and workshop experiences appropriate for our community. Here is a list of the training, workshops, and community engagement sessions which have been provided locally:

<b>TITLE of Workshop</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b># of Participants</b>
NCBI Welcoming Diversity - Exposure Workshop	March 28, 2019	27
NCBI Welcoming Diversity - Exposure Workshop	March 29, 2019	30
NCBI Welcoming Diversity - Exp. Workshop, w/Students	Sept. 16, 2019	29
NCBI Train-the-Trainer Workshop	Sept. 18-20, 2019	25
Community Engagement Session - NPH	Sept. 16, 2019	63
Community Engagement Session - TAN	Sept. 18, 2019	66
Community Engagement Session - BEN	Sept. 23, 2019	21
Community Engagement Session - WVH	Sept. 26, 2019	39
FCB Exposure Workshop - Pearl Creek	Nov. 11, 2019	40
FCB Exposure Workshop - Anne Wien	Nov. 22, 2019	43
FCB Exposure Workshop - Non-Profit Coalitions	Dec. 11, 2019	36
FCB Mini-Exposure Workshop - Federal Programs	Dec. 16, 2019	30
FCB Exposure Workshop - North Pole High	Feb. 17, 2020	40
FCB Exposure Workshop - Denali	Feb. 19, 2020	35
FCB Exposure Workshop	Feb. 24, 2020	25
FCB Exposure Workshop for T&L Diversity Class	March 3, 2020	16



Exposure Workshop &  
Community  
Engagement Session  
Attendees

To date, there have been over 320 local participants in the combined NCBI and FCB workshops and community engagement sessions, including students, parents, educators, members of the public, and law enforcement.

## **Fairbanks Coalition Builders**

One of the primary goals of the Train-the-Trainer workshop in September was to establish local training teams prepared to continue the work for our schools and community partners. This goal was achieved with the successful completion of the training workshop and the formation of three **Fairbanks Coalition Builders** (FCB) teams:

- **Team 1: Michael Angaiak & Shayna Ellingrud**

- Abigail J. North
- Carrie W. Bragonier
- Flora P. Roddy
- Janet Farris
- Jess Peña
- Laurie A. Trotta

- **Team 2: Rod Gray & Kate LaPlaunt**

- Adam D. Morotti
- Charleen C. Fisher
- Jamie A. Jones
- Katie E. Dabney
- Lesa Meath
- Lori Gildehaus
- Shoshana Kun

- **Team 3: Rodney Gaskin & Yatibaey Evans**

- Diana Dillard
- Emily Sousa
- Jennifer Anderson
- Jesse M. Hensel
- Nancy Teter

Starting with the Community Engagement Session in September, the FCB teams began carrying on the work of providing tailored workshops to schools, district departments and community organizations. Between November 2019 and March 2020, these FCB teams conducted an additional 8 workshops or training. (Workshops were not scheduled during 4th-Quarter because of the Covid-19 school closure.)

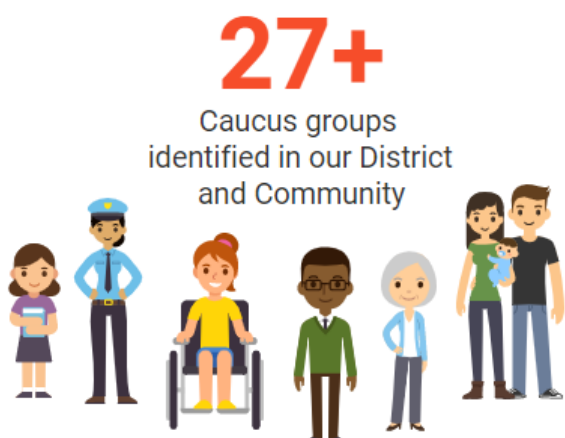
Exposure Workshops follow a format developed in consultation with our National NCBI Training partners Fae Brooks and Ira Baumgarter, which is flexible enough to be adapted by the facilitators. This allows team leaders to adjust the focus of each workshop to suit the specific needs of the group.

Therefore, no two workshops are alike, as the topics and discussions change according to the participants. What stays the same is the commitment to creating a safe, non-judgemental, confidential place for people to listen, share and learn about each other. Most workshops are between 2 to 4 hours with groups of 15 to 45 participants.

During every workshop, participants are introduced to the concept of coalition building or caucus groups. The concept is natural and embraces the idea that there is comfort in meeting with people who have similar experiences or backgrounds. In the safety of caucus groups, participants are guided to consider what they “never want others to think, do or say about their group”, what they “are proud about their group”, and what “others can do to be an ally” to their group. Following this coalition-building exercise the group then shares their list with the whole group, allowing an opportunity for others to identify with them, and learn how to be an ally in the future. Inevitably common threads emerge, helping participants see that everyone desires respect, consideration, and safety.

*“Strategies for helping create safe space were valuable. The identity and bias exercises were excellent. Overall, I really appreciated the facilitators and the fact that FNSBSD is investing in opportunities like this for staff and community members in order to build a better environment for our young people and one another.”*

While the individual participants remain anonymous the FCB does maintain a record of the caucus groups and their comments for our purpose of advocating and building a more welcoming organization. Currently, there have been 27 unique caucus groups who have chosen to share their thoughts through the coalition-building exercise.



Common among every caucus group is the desire to be acknowledged beyond a single label or identity trait. Everyone desires the opportunity to feel safe in their community and to be welcomed and respected where they work, play, learn, and worship. People want to be valued for their contributions to society and their ability to be a friend. Along with that, caucus groups often implore others to “get to know us”, “ask about our culture”, “be interested in what we have to say”. It

seems that in order to create a welcoming place it helps to show genuine interest in others. The Alaska Native caucus groups frequently said that to be an ally to them would include showing an interest in their culture, learn some of their words, and have respect for their different communication styles. The African American caucus groups had similar suggestions for allies, specifically requesting that people and organizations show an interest in their perspectives and experience.



*“This was a great way to recognize the stereotypes we have on our personal records. I am definitely more aware of what I am letting influence my interactions with others.”*

### **Local People reaching Local People:**

The Fairbanks Coalition Builders have established that a team of trained local people can make a difference. The elegance of this model is that it belongs to the FNSBSD and can grow as nurtured by the district. In the current capacity, each FCB Training Team can provide workshops to schools, organizations, student groups, departments, and business partners with a goal of one workshop or training per quarter, for a total of 12 per year. The hope is to schedule two “Welcome to Diversity - Exposure Workshops” each year led by the FCB Leadership Team to widen our reach to the public. Next year we hope to send additional team members to the NCBI National Training and plan to add another training team to our roster. This will build our capacity to provide half-day and whole-day workshops and reach more people.

### **Moving Forward:**

On the horizon is establishing a Student Group at one of the local high schools or middle schools. A student organization needs an established leader at the school who can guide monthly workshop sessions and facilitate coalition and cross-coalition team-building exercises. Students who participated in the September Exposure Workshop appreciated the opportunity to address issues of inequity and intolerance that they experience or witness. They felt that the process of creating a safe environment for students to share different points of view would be helpful in creating more welcoming schools where everyone belongs.

*“I really appreciate that the district and our community is heading in this direction. And I really feel that we need some dynamic programs on race and diversity in our younger grades.”*