



Lack of diversity in educator ethnicities

As the racial demographic of JHS students has changed, JHS teachers' have remained the same

words & layout | Nick Irwin & Kathryn Ikeda

Johnston's population has grown immensely. From the 2000 census to the 2016 special census, the population increased by 230 percent from 8,877 to 20,460. The city has not only increased in size, but has also become more diverse. In 2000, the city's population was 91 percent Caucasian, decreasing to 89 percent by 2016. The school district has also become more diverse, with 76 percent of the district-wide student body being white. However, the number of non-white teachers in the district remains at two percent.

Hiring and marketing

Many administrators believe the problems stem from a small pool of candidates. "We need to increase our diversity of our staff when we can, and sell our profession as it's for all people," principal Ryan Woods said. "We want great teachers."

Associate principal Jerry Stratton acknowledges the lack of diverse applicants. "We create as much diversity as we can, but it's based on who we end up having in front of us to interview," he said.

Part of the difficulty of hiring diverse teachers is due to federal law. Federal law prohibits employers from requiring applicants to state their race, age, sex or creed.

Stratton and many other educators believe hav-

ing teachers and students of the same race helps students of color form a connection with their teacher, and, by extension, their class. "I want an experience that every student has a connection," Stratton said. "Will that happen because we have diversity within our teaching staff? It might. The difficulty is, if we have that approach, how do we bring staff in to simulate that diversity?"

Stratton believes that we should not focus on just a single aspect of diversity. While a diverse teaching staff does help, Stratton thinks there is more to diversity than just race. "Diversity comes in a lot

"Diversity comes in a lot of different ways. It's not just a cultural thing."

-Associate Principal Jerry Stratton

of different ways," he said. "It's not just a cultural thing. It could be learning styles or interests outside of class."

The district frequently visits teaching fairs, events where newly-graduated college students speak to administrators about career opportunities. Several teachers in the district were hired us-

ing this method.

However, Woods has observed that even at these teacher fairs, the number of diverse students is still very low. He believes that if the district visited other out-of-state colleges the ratio of diverse students would increase.

Woods thinks that the ratio of diverse teachers should be the same as the ratio of diverse students, but does not believe it is going to happen. "In a perfect world, our teaching staff would match the diversity of our student population," he said.

Executive Director of Human Resources Laura Kacer believes that the district should not prioritize hiring diverse teachers for diversity's sake. "We always want to make sure that we are hiring the best teacher possible. Hiring solely based on the diversity of the candidate isn't an appropriate hiring practice," Kacer said.

Teachers and students

Social studies teacher Alicia Rollison identifies as biracial. She thinks the lack of diverse teachers is particular to Johnston's location. "If people don't see themselves in professions, it does hinder what professions people then aspire themselves to be," she said. "I think that can affect student's focus in life, as well as what they think they can be."

Rollison believes that it is best to prioritize minority teachers over white teachers.

As a teenager, she did not think about the lack diverse staff. She grew up in Johnston so she was used to the lack of diversity, but the issue has only recently caught her attention due to discussion about it.

Rollison tries to implement learning opportuni-

"The school doesn't seem to care about a lot of things other than making sure we graduate."

-Jaydn Lovelady '17

ties about racial diversity into her classes. "I don't think we do enough to talk about diversity with the students," she said. "I sometimes struggle to figure out how to incorporate it into the curriculum."

However, Rollison thinks that incorporating diversity into schoolwork may backfire if it is a modern issue or is not implemented correctly. "I always think that our minority students have pressure since they are usually one in a class," she said. "If a racial topic comes up, everyone looks at them and thinks they can speak for all of their race."

After being one of the few non-white teachers at the school for 15 years, Rollison does not believe diversity in staff is one of the school's main concerns. "I don't think the school prioritizes diversity," she said. "If we want it to be reflective of the school

body, we have to be proactive. We can't just wish for more minority applicants."

Jaydn Lovelady '17 is used to having mostly white teachers but still wishes they were more diverse. "It would be comforting to have some minority teachers," she said. "I'd like to be able to talk to an adult that aren't my parents about issues that white people cannot relate to in the same way."

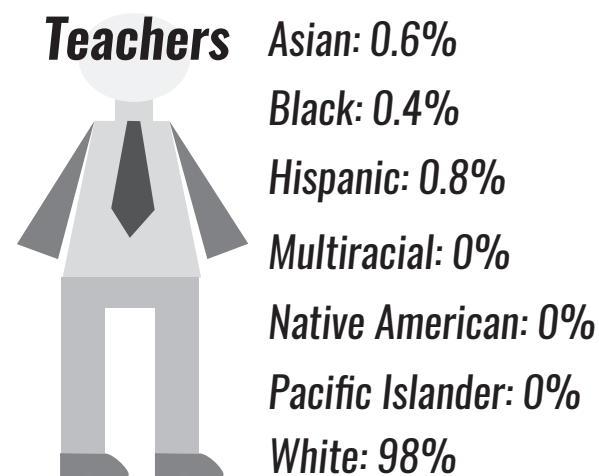
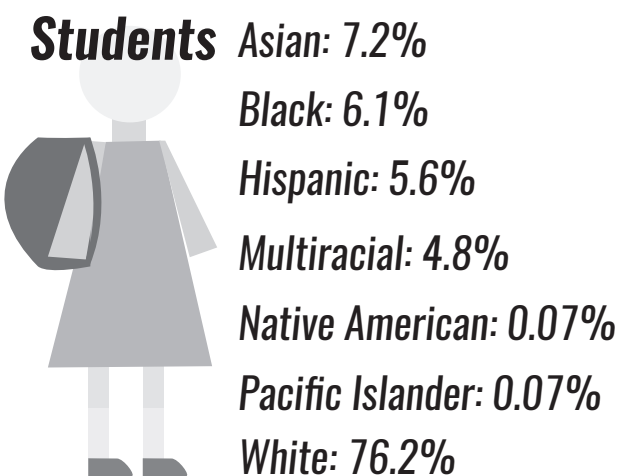
Lovelady shares the belief that the school does not make staff diversity a priority. "The school doesn't seem to care about a lot of things other than making sure we graduate," she said. "The school's interest in mental health skyrocketed after the district experienced issues because of it. But we haven't had issues because of a lack of colored teachers. No one's going to say anything or do anything about it, because the majority of the students don't look at it or see the impact."

She does not believe that, for all the comments the school makes about valuing diversity, it is a real priority. "The school doesn't care," Lovelady said. "All the school thinks about is what it looks like to the public. They care about the rich and powerful parents, not the minority students or educators."

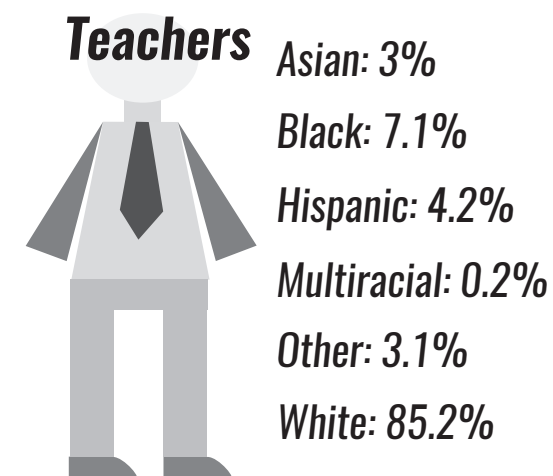
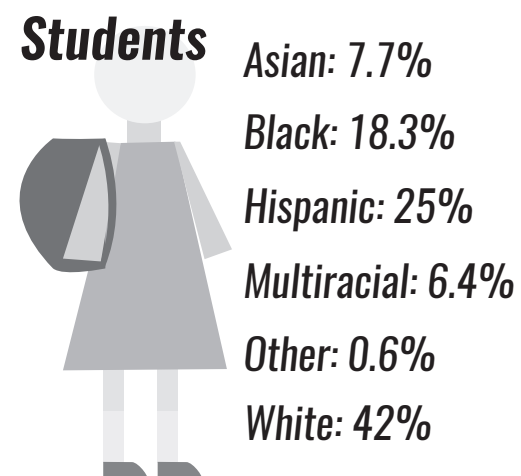
Evan Erickson '18 is Native American and a member of the Bad River tribe. Erickson has noticed the lack of diverse teachers, but does not consider it an issue.

Erickson thinks that the problem will fix itself as time goes on, and there isn't much the school can do to help speed up that process. "I think it kind of just comes with time as Johnston keeps growing and we get more staff," he said. "I know I'm not concerned with diversity in school."

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