

Moving Backward with Equity and Inclusion

Johnston needs to start taking equity seriously.

Anita Dinakar

One image of the Johnston Community School District website's homepage proudly showcases 30 silhouettes of students in various skin tones underneath the words "Moving forward with equity and inclusion." However, the district's actions and student experiences tell a different story about equity and inclusion in Johnston.

After serving as the Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging for a little over one year, Louis Fountain announced his resignation from the position in August 2022. On February 6, 2023, the school board voted against keeping the position. Students are feeling the loss of Fountain, but the district must address the structural issues that led to his departure before bringing the position back.

As school board members continue to argue over diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, it is easy to forget about the students who suffer the consequences of the school's failures in equity.

"I feel like there are some people who are just unfair to others just because they don't view them as equal to themselves.... We don't talk about [equity] a lot, people just kind of set it aside or don't talk about it as much..." Eliana Elizondo 23' said.

Racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, misogyny, and many other types of discrimination create barriers and make school less welcoming for minority students.

"I noticed that my friend, he sometimes gets judged by who he is because he likes boys. I get judged by who I am because I like females. Just because I like females, or he likes boys doesn't mean anything. Just because I'm Black and he's white does not mean anything, none of that matters," Saleena Goldman 25' said.

Johnston students feel even more unsafe at school when prejudice escalates to threats and harassment. A parent spoke about targeted threats at a school board meeting when the equity director position was first being reconsidered.

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... Threats against minority students are prevalent and need to be addressed,” Temeshia Bomato, a Johnston parent, said.

The Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging used to address incidents between students and general inequities in the school system.

“The DEI director was the sole advocate in place to address these instances and mitigate their occurrences. Minority students experiencing a hostile learning environment lost the one voice they had in this district and the school board is failing them by choosing not to provide for this role,” Bomato said.

One area that could be improved with the help of an equity director is some teachers’ biases against certain students.

“I feel like they’re pretty good at [treating students equitably]. Sometimes I feel like some people have a stereotypical mind when they’re like, ‘Oh you’re not gonna be good,’ but they’re surprised when you actually are,” Hailey Akinsola 23’ said.

Without a well-supported Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, the work needed to prevent minority students from being attacked and simply having an equal environment for learning is left undone.

While students lost a great advocate in Fountain, the school district never took the role of Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging seriously even when they had the position. Johnston featured Fountain on the front page of the district website for months, with his name misspelled. The district also failed to understand the realities of the issues equity directors are tasked with addressing, and did not provide the necessary resources, support, and trust to execute the job.

An equity director can not be very effective if the position is intended to be just for show. The district wasn’t truly on board with the last equity director and needs to fully support the position with the weight of the institution to live up to its promise of providing an equitable education.

“There is a lot of work that needs to be done in order for that person, a DEI director, to come into this district and be effective.... I don't think at this moment that we should bring in a DEI director because the infrastructure that needs to support that director is not there.... But I want a commitment from this board that we are moving in that direction,” school board member Soneeta Mangra-Dutcher said.

The board has discussed doing a climate survey and an equity audit as steps to take before hiring an equity director. However, it is highly unlikely that these steps will be taken and executed properly, as some school board members remain opposed.

“I don’t know what equity is, it’s an undefinable term.... A culture survey, perhaps. The only questionnaires that we were given as examples were clearly designed to paint some type of agenda that may or may not exist. ‘Have you ever felt uncomfortable at school? Have you ever felt threatened? Was there a time you [...]’ and all of those were negative,” school board member Clint Evans said at the school board meeting. Being serious about equity means asking questions about difficult topics, even if they are negative. Discrimination in education isn’t going to be solved by only talking about the positives. The only way to reveal the existence and extent of equity issues is by conducting a thorough survey.

Another school board member criticized DEI director positions for only dealing with racial issues.

“It’s shallow, and it’s about skin color... I will never, ever vote for anything in favor of a DEI director until my four years are up, and I’m out of here. Ever. And so, if we could say that we hire a DEI director, and they’re gonna talk about kids that need help getting on a school bus, ‘cause they’re having problems paying for school lunch and that they have a financial issue I did see the trainings that were being designed ... and it didn’t have anything to do with that as far as I saw,” Derek Tidball said.

Transportation issues and financial issues are absolutely problems in Johnston and an important part of equity work. However, there are already administrative departments that specialize in these areas. Racial issues are no longer being addressed by a qualified administrator.

An equity director can’t fully address all of these types of equity issues if they are not given the proper resources in the first place. According to the district organizational chart, the Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging was the only administrative position without any support staff. Johnston isn’t alone in having structural issues with diversity positions.

According to the Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 55% of Chief Diversity Officers at colleges said their roles were not optimally structured, and 93% of them said that diversity infrastructure on their campuses needed to change.

Equity directors are set up to fail, let alone capable of addressing longstanding educational inequalities, without the support and cooperation of students, teachers, parents, and most importantly, other school administrators and the school board.

“Without a director in the equity space, without teachers and staff, and even the school board learning about their own unconscious biases, without addressing any of this, our district will continue to struggle. Our students will struggle,” parent Beth Arnold said.

You can encourage the district to start taking equity seriously and do the work to support a future equity director by contacting members of the school board. Students can also vote or spread awareness about school board elections in November.

Stuff i wanted to include but don't know where to put/don't have space for

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One area that could be improved with the help of an equity director is some teachers' biases against certain students.

"I feel like they're pretty good at (treating students equitably). Sometimes I feel like some people have a stereotypical mind when they're like, 'Oh you're not gonna be good,' but they're surprised when you actually are," Akinsola said.

"Sometimes I hear people talking and I'm like, 'Wow that wasn't inclusive,' and they're just saying stuff about racism. . . They think they're joking but . . . you're not a part of that group, so it's not really a joke," Hailey Akinsola 23' said.

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"Without a director in the equity space, without addressing any of this, our district will continue to struggle. Our students will struggle," parent Beth Arnold said in a school board meeting. INCLUDED ✓

Full quote:

"There is a targeted application of policies within district. Without a director in the equity space, without teachers and staff, and even the school board learning about their own unconscious biases, without addressing any of this, our district will continue to struggle, our students will struggle. . . . Every week in September ... I have had a call at the end of every week of one of my friend's children, being bullied, being victims of a variety of different attacks, at our schools. These kids are BIPOC, these kids are LGBTQ, they're a variety of things. Se we need to actually look at this, and not continue to do things as we always have. It's not working" Beth Arnold said.

paragraphs/information/points i could include - tell me if any of these would be good to include

General plan and potential talking points

New position: District should do work to eventually get equity director OR ~~District needs to invest in DEI generally~~

- Not going to have equity director
- Shouldn't have one yet
 - Quotes from waverly?
- District was never committed to equity in the first place
- Talk about/explain equity audit?
- Talk about equity survey
- ~~Original timing of equity efforts: can this be connected to the idea of performative activism after BLM protests and then people abandoning these things later? (may be a bit of a stretch and also hard to write in a way that is interesting)~~

Outline

1. Louis Fountain left ✓
2. (Determine order)
 - District didn't support him to begin with
 - Say that DEI director is only major admin role w/o staff underneath it?
 - consequences/student reality of inequity: bulk of article??
 - District needs to start building infrastructure now
 - More Quotes
 - District should follow through with survey, audit, then director plan,
- Talk about climate/equity survey stuff??
 - Clint said the survey example was too negative, we never ask kids if they had a good day or if they have a teacher they can talk to
 - Do you have a teacher you trust is literally a survey question we're asked every year
 - Connect to student audience by mentioning that we all hate surveys, but also promote a good equity survey

- We do all these annoying surveys, yet are never asked about racism, homophobia, equity, etc. The current surveys dont have a place to share these experiences
- Am I allowed to talk about the CORE equity survey if I am involved in it?
- Other school board points/potential quotes:
 - Deb saying do work with existing staff, Soneeta says they're overworked
 - Tidball saying equity should include more than skin color
 - transportation, IEP issues already have administrative position specifically for them
 - Evans/Tidball no evidence dei directors work
 - Can't work w/support
 - Liason option: nobody wanted
 - Clint idk what equity is, wont commit to steps, Tidball will never support equity director
- Statistics/research that show equity directors don't work if the role isn't structured properly
 - 55% of chief diversity officers say role is not optimally structured
- Promote urgency, say that district should actually listen to students, do stuff to prep for equity director etc.
- Call to action
 - District: actually do equity stuff
 - Students: email/speak to school board members

Stuff I wrote already that i could use, have to figure out how to organize it

Johnston needs to not only hire an equity director but also give the role attention and seriousness for the sake of students. An equity director can not produce any results if the position is simply for show.

A common criticism of DEI directors is that they are ineffective in improving equity. DEI directors alone are ineffective: they need the trust and cooperation of other administrators, teachers, students, and parents to make any difference. The Johnston community as a whole has to be on board to truly provide minority students with the equal education they are entitled to.

Even if the school board decides to keep the equity director position, it will be months before a new director can be hired and begin to meet student needs. Without an equity director, minority students regularly face harsh environments without a qualified person to support them. (1st sentence would need to be reworded to discuss delays with steps to get equity directors - could use Fiala quote about built in delays)

Harmful climates for students are worsened by the lack of attention to these issues.

“I feel like there are some people who are just unfair to others just because they don't view them as equal to themselves.... We don't talk about it (equity) a lot, people just kind of set it aside or don't talk about it as much...” Eliana Elizondo 23' said.

Simply having a Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging is the bare minimum to discuss and address issues affecting students. A school equity director needs support from the school administration to be effective and create real change in schools. If an equity director is hired, Johnston must improve support by learning from its mistakes.

Johnston featured the previous Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging on the front page of the website for months with his name misspelled. Johnston needs to not only hire an equity director but also give the role attention and seriousness for the sake of students. An equity director can not produce any results if the position is simply for show. (re-worded and used all of this)

(Is highlighted material still relevant or fluff? Also depends on how long the article is with all the new points)

A long history of discrimination in schools and other factors creating inequality make the job of an equity director especially difficult. The Johnston Community School District needs a trained equity director who they empower to do the hard work to create change for students.

The need for this position is not specific to Johnston's issues. Other metro schools like Des Moines Public Schools, Waukee, Ames, and Ankeny have equity directors, according to their websites.

Instances of racism between schools, such as an Ankeny student calling a Johnston basketball player racial slurs as described in both schools' joint statement, highlight the responsibility to have an equity director. Having an equity director would help in responding to these situations, protecting Johnston minority students, and promoting a culture that discourages Johnston students from behaving in similarly racist ways.

These responsibilities are even greater because of Johnston's demographics. There are so few racial, LGBTQ+, and other minority students that exclusion occurs more easily and there is a bigger disconnect between students from different backgrounds. Having an equity director would be a start at making Johnston safer for diverse students, which could also improve Johnston's diversity in the first place.

While some students, especially those who aren't minorities, do feel included in Johnston, a designated person must address equity to keep up with the broader social divisions and to continue closing the gap for the students who are excluded.

"The support system... they listen to you, they don't ignore you," Brandon Leon 24' said.

Johnston has systems in place to help students learn their best, but improvements in equity are needed to make sure all students feel supported, not just some. One area that could be improved with the help of an equity director is some teachers' biases against certain students.

"I feel like they're pretty good at (treating students equitably). Sometimes I feel like some people have a stereotypical mind when they're like, 'Oh you're not gonna be good,' but they're surprised when you actually are," Akinsola said.

Without a well-supported Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, the work needed to prevent minority students from being attacked and simply having an equal environment for learning is left undone.

"Without a director in the equity space, without addressing any of this, our district will continue to struggle. Our students will struggle," parent Beth Arnold said in a school board meeting.

Old layout

STUDENTS STRUGGLE WITHOUT AN EQUITY DIRECTOR

STUDENT EXPERIENCES HIGHLIGHT UNMET NEEDS IN THE ABSENCE OF A DIRECTOR OF EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING.

BY ANITA DINAKAR
DECEMBER 16, 2022

In May 2021, the Johnston Community School District hired Louis Fountain as its first Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. Since Fountain's resignation this August, the school board has yet to decide whether to keep the position despite ongoing issues in inclusion, equity, and belonging.

After Fountain's resignation, the school board announced that they would follow protocol by re-assessing the position. Students and community members demanded that the position be filled because of pressing problems in Johnston schools.

"Another student at Summit said he will beat up anyone who is LGBTQ+ ... Threats against minority students are prevalent and need to be addressed. The DEI director was the sole advocate in place to address these instances and mitigate their occurrences. Minority students experiencing a hostile learning environment lost the one voice they had in this district and the school board is failing them by choosing not to provide for this role," parent Temesha Bomato said.

The school board has not posted the Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging position despite inequity and exclusion occurring in the months since the position has been vacated.

"Sometimes I hear people talking and I'm like, 'Wow that wasn't inclusive,' and they're just saying stuff about racism... They think they're joking but... you're not a part of that group, so it's not really a joke," Hailey Akinsola 23' said.

Problems in how students treat each other are worsened by the lack of attention to these issues.

"I feel like there are some people who are just unfair to others just because they don't view them as equal to themselves... We don't talk about it a lot, people just kind of set it aside or don't talk about it as much and I think in a huge community like this it would be helpful for the school to bring back that position," Eliana Alizondo 23' said.

Having a Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging would provide a platform to discuss and address issues affecting students. This need for this position is not specific to Johnston's issues but is something that is needed by any school to promote good learning environments.

Other metro schools like Des Moines Public Schools, Waukee, and Ames, have equity directors. Ankeny, like Johnston, has faced calls to fill their recently vacated Diversity Officer position as well.

While a number of students do feel included in Johnston, Johnston must have a designated person addressing equity to keep up with the broader social divisions and to continue to close the gap for the students who don't feel included and treated equitably.

"The support system... they listen to you, they don't ignore you," Brandon Leon 24' said.

Johnston has systems in place to help students learn their best, but improvements in equity are needed to make sure all students feel supported, not just some. One area that could be improved with the help of an equity director is some teachers' biases against certain students.

"I feel like they're pretty good at (treating students equitably). Sometimes I feel like some people have a stereotypical mind when they're like, 'Oh you're not gonna be good,' but they're surprised when you actually are," Akinsola 23' said.

Equity in the classroom is extremely important to a good environment for learning. When students feel respected, it is easier for them to learn.

"You can focus, you know people are going to be there for you," Leon said.

Investing in an equity director is the bare minimum to provide a good education for a diverse student population. The task of addressing issues in equity given a long history of discrimination in schools and other factors that affect student learning is difficult. A school equity director needs support from the school administration to be effective.

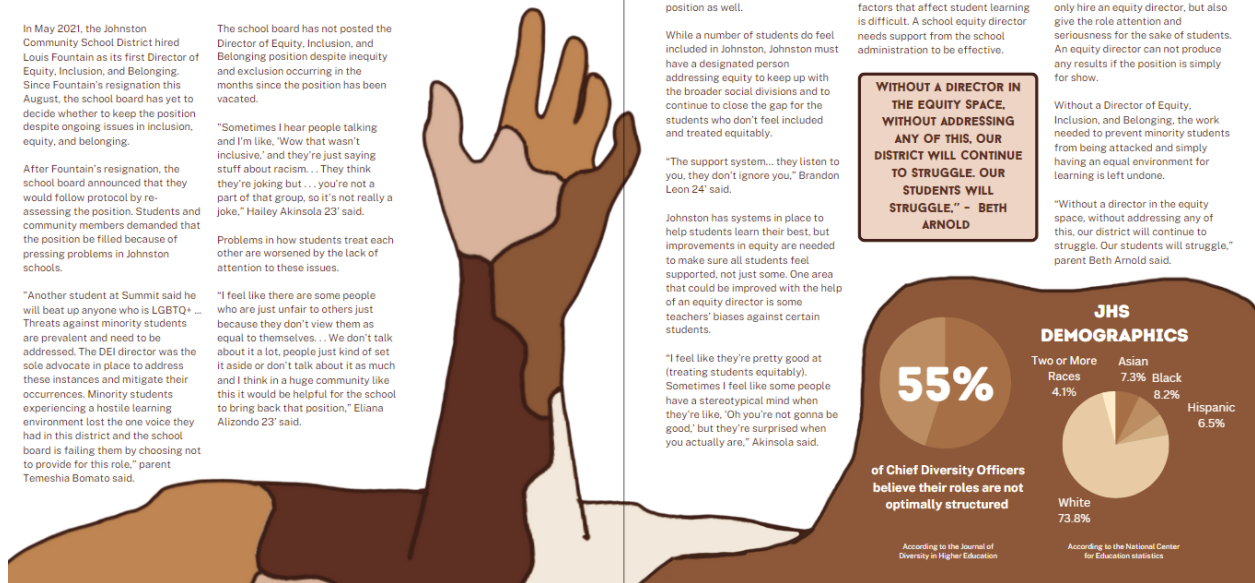
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- Will probably have to change pull-quote
- Fix right corner to look better
- Define equity as a mod?
 - Instead or in addition to stats?
 - Use 55% stat in article if as mod
 -
 - Equity - noun (FAIRNESS)
the situation in which everyone is treated fairly according to their needs and no group of people is given special treatment - Cambridge dictionary
 -
 -
- Do in indesign
 - Will have to change fonts

MOVING BACKWARDS WITH EQUITY AND INCLUSION

The needs of diverse Johnston students are not met in the absence of diversity, equity and inclusion supports.

Words & Layout | Anita Dinakar

One version of the Johnston Community School District website's homepage proudly showcases 30 silhouettes of heads in various skin tones underneath the words "Moving forward with equity and inclusion." However, the district's actions and student experiences tell a different story about equity and inclusion in Johnston.

In May 2021, the Johnston Community School District announced the hiring of Louis Fountain as its first Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. Fountain announced his resignation in August 2022, and on February 6, 2023, the school board voted against keeping the position.

Johnston is not currently in a place to have an equity director and give them the support they need to be effective. Students regularly face discrimination, but hiring an equity director has to be done the right way: first, district administrators need to understand the realities that minority students face. Then, the school board must take steps to make sure a future equity director will receive the resources and trust from the district and the community necessary to execute their job.

When school board members argue over diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, it is easy to forget about people who suffer the consequences of the school's failures in equity: students.

"Sometimes I hear people talking and I'm like, 'Wow that wasn't inclusive,' and they're just saying stuff about racism... They think they're joking but... you're not a part of that group, so it's not really a joke," Hailey Akinsola 23 said.

Racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, misogyny, and many other types of discrimination create barriers and make school less welcoming for minority students. "I noticed that my friend, he sometimes gets judged by who he is because he likes boys. I get judged by who I am because I like females. Just because I like females or he likes boys doesn't mean anything. Just because I'm Black and he's white does not mean anything, none of that matters," Saleena Goldman 25 said.

Prejudice alone has a big impact on mental health and the learning environment for minority students. Johnston students feel even more unsafe at school because of threats and harassment. A parent spoke about targeted threats at a school board meeting when the equity director position was first being reconsidered. "My child who attends 6th grade



at Summit Middle School was threatened by a student who said 'If I had a gun and a bullet, I'd shoot you,' which was overheard by a staff member. Another student at Summit said he will beat up anyone who is LGBTQ+... Threats against minority students are prevalent and need to be addressed," Temeshia Bomato said.

The Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging used to be involved in addressing incidents between students and general inequities in the school system.

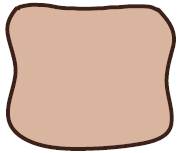
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Johnston featured Fountain on the front page of the district website for months with his name misspelled. An equity director can not be very effective if the position is intended to be just for show. The district wasn't truly on board with the last equity director and needs internal change to live up to its promise of providing an equitable education.

"There is a lot of work that needs to be done in order for that person, a DEI director, to come into this district and be effective... I don't think at this moment that we should bring in a DEI Director because the infrastructure that needs to support that director is not there... But I want a commitment from this board that we are moving in that direction," school board member Soneeta Mangra-Dutcher said.

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steps to take before hiring an equity director. However, it is doubtful that these steps will be taken and done properly as some school board members have taken issue with them.

"I don't know what equity is, it's an undefinable term... A culture survey, perhaps. The only questionnaires that we were given as examples were clearly design to paint some type of agenda that may or may not exist. 'Have you ever felt uncomfortable at school? Have you ever felt threatened? Was there a time you (...) and all of those were negative,' school board member Clint Evans said. Being serious about equity means asking questions about difficult topics even if they are negative. Discrimination in education isn't going to be solved by only talking about positions. Another school board member criticized DEI Director positions for only working on racial issues. 'It's shallow, and it's about skin color... I will never, ever vote for

anything in favor of a DEI director until my four years are up and I'm out of here. Ever... And so, if we could say that we hire a DEI director, and they're gonna talk about kids that need help getting on a school bus, 'cause kids they're having problems paying for school lunch and that they have a financial issue which we can't even get that data because it's protected... I saw the training... and it didn't have anything to do with that as far as I saw," Derek Tidball said. Transportation issues and financial issues are absolutely problems in Johnston and an important part of equity work. However, there are already administrative departments that specialize in these and other areas. Racial issues, which often intersect with these issues, are no longer being addressed by a qualified director. An equity director can't fully address all types of equity issues if they are not given the proper resources in the first place. According to the district organizational chart, the Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging was the only administrative position without staff underneath them. Johnston isn't alone in having structural issues with diversity positions. According to the Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 55% of Chief Diversity Officers at colleges said their roles were not optimally structured, and 93% of them said the diversity infrastructure on their campuses needed to change. Equity directors alone are useless, let alone capable of addressing historically rooted educational inequalities, without the support and cooperation of students, teachers, parents, and most

Equity (noun)
the situation in which everyone is treated fairly according to their needs and no group of people is given special treatment

— Cambridge Dictionary

- How to make Top Left lede and byline and bottom right mod look nicer
- Way too long

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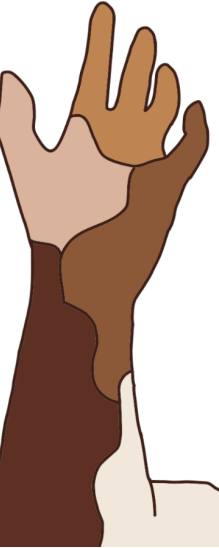
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istrative departments that specialize in these areas. Racial issues are no longer being addressed by a qualified administrator.

An equity director can't fully address all of these types of equity issues if they are not given the proper resources in the first place. According to the district organizational chart, the Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging was the only administrative position without any support staff. Johnston isn't alone in having structural issues with diversity positions.

According to the Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 55% of Chief Diversity Officers at colleges said their roles were not optimally structured, and 93% of them said that diversity infrastructure on their campuses needed to change.

Equity directors are set up to fail, let alone capable of addressing long-standing educational inequalities, without the support and cooperation of students, teachers, parents, and most importantly, other school administrators and the school board.

"Without a director in the equity space, without teachers and staff, and even the school board learning about their own unconscious biases, without addressing any of this, our district will continue to struggle. Our students will struggle," parent Beth Arnold said.

You can encourage the district to start taking equity seriously and do the work to support a future equity director by contacting members of the school board. Students can also vote or spread awareness about school board elections in November.

Equity (noun)
the situation in which everyone is treated fairly according to their needs and no group of people is given special treatment

- Cambridge Dictionary