

# A student interview with Dr. Roy on systemic racism in the Bethlehem schools

The Bethlehem Gadfly Community Engagement Initiative, George Floyd killing October 28, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Community Engagement Initiative* 

## **Virtual Health Equity Summit: Racial Justice for Stronger Communities Hispanic Center Lehigh Valley October 27 2020**

Gadfly has remarked more than once at the wealth of local events and resources available to us in this post GeorgeFloyd period of national reckoning with race.

Yesterday was a great Gadfly day in that regard.

In the morning was the Hispanic Center event and at night another of BAPL's "Courageous Conversations" moderated by Rayah Levy.

There were three parts to the HCLV event: Systemic Racism in K-12 Education, The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Communities of Color, and Understanding Colorism within the Hispanic Community.

Gadfly learned from them all, but he is just going to focus here on the education one with Dr. Roy and students Xenise Price and Dayanara Marrero-Allen since it is more related to topics we've been discussing here on the blog.

Dr. Roy is always a good interview.

Gadfly planned to just excerpt a piece for you.

Instead, you have the whole segment.

Listen, don't depend on Gadfly's text — just paraphrasing and giving you the gist.

Enjoy!



### “Systemic Racism in K-12 Education”

Dr. Joseph Roy and students Xenise Price and Dayanara Marrero-Allen

**Why do you think that teachers aren’t encouraging and supporting students of color to take higher level classes? (3 mins.)**

One of the challenges we have to overcome is encouraging students more. One of the solutions may be encouraging students to sign up in groups to overcome the solitary student of color situation. Doing a better job of “cohort scheduling.”

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**Why does it seem that white students get more opportunities in choosing classes? (3 mins.)**

We have to start further back and lay the groundwork. We need to do a better job of literacy skills. We have an intense focus on early literacy skills to prepare for the advanced work later.

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**What about the role of counselors? (2 mins.)**

Course selection time is critical for all of us in school to not think of courses in terms of a gatekeeper mentality. We want to be the gate opener. A student recounts a positive experience in this regard.

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**Why do you think that students feel that they have to work twice as hard to keep up with the white kids to get the same opportunity? (2 mins.)**

I've been heavily involved in equity and access. And we're moving to more heterogeneous, mixed groupings in Middle School.

**In addition to tracking, what else is the school district doing to promote equity in the schools? (3 mins.)**

The most impactful is literacy. A second is our challenge for everybody to be anti-racist. We've been looking at opportunities to improve participation in sports, activities, and clubs, for instance. Dual enrollment classes with college as another concrete thing. Gifted education too.

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**Students of color aren't really being prepared for advanced classes . . . Why aren't students of color being mixed more, and doesn't it seem a little counterproductive for teachers to teach this way? (2 mins.)**

That's an issue that has been fixed. Old model is gone. We've received national recognition for what we're doing in early education. Working on it at higher levels.

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**Teachers and staff . . . Are they proportionate to students of color? (4 mins.)**

No, certainly not. A challenge. Making some progress each year. Started an education pathway here, to grow our own teachers here. Also connecting with Temple University to figure out how to recruit people to

come here. Not an easy sell to come to the Lehigh Valley. Selling the lifestyle in the Lehigh Valley. The students agreed that more teachers of color would be a benefit.

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**What is something you are proud of at the Bethlehem School District? (1 min.)**

How teachers and students have handled the pandemic.

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**Dr. Roy talks of the digital divide and the pandemic. (3 mins.)**

Pandemic has put spotlight on inequities in society. Trouble for some students keeping up with schoolwork. Worried about them. We're working to close the digital divide. Great progress.

*Tip o' the hat to HCLV for doing this!*