

MCPS IVALUE Newsletter – November 2021

Inclusion. Validation. Action. Learning. Understanding. Equity.

About this newsletter

The IVALUE newsletter will be sent out each month and will include resources, updates, and articles on topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in public schools.

Monthly editions will also include resources and guidance for heritage and diversity holidays such as Black History Month and Pride Month. In this issue we have included content for Native American Heritage Day, Thanksgiving, and Hanukkah.

We would love to include authentic voices in our newsletter and welcome contributors! If you would like to share your experience and expertise please contact Dacia Griego, dgriego@mcpsmt.org.

What is IVALUE?

The IVALUE Anti-Bias Working Group is an initiative by Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS) to move forward with creating a more inclusive workplace and school setting.

We recognize that our community needs to learn skills in order to be aware of and interrupt bias related to race, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, creed, citizenship status, ability, economic or social conditions, or marital or parental status.

IVALUE Background

In the 2019-20 school year, Missoula County Public Schools formed the IVALUE group with the intention of creating an inclusive MCPS community. Members included professionals in the field of anti-bias and racial justice work and many more were recruited to represent the MCPS community. The group worked for approximately 3 months to brainstorm and plan work actions that would be made by the group. The work of the group was paused due to the pandemic. After reviewing the progress and determining a place to pick back up, the following changes are proposed:

1. All future work around diversity, equity and inclusion within MCPS should have a primary focus of centering the experience and growing the leadership of specific groups within the District including: BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color), members of the LGBTQIA+ community, members of various religious communities, individuals who speak a language other than English or who come from other countries, and individuals who experience economic, physical or developmental challenges.
2. A leadership team should be established that includes those with experience and expertise in anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion training and work.

3. The other members of the I VALUE working group who are invested in the process but need additional training would create a cohort of allies and supporters. The leadership team could delegate specific tasks to this group, and this group would be among the first cohorts to receive training. They would act as leaders within the MCPS community in implementing social change.

4. Identify and take action on known issues while concurrently planning, training and researching.

IVALUE Anti-Bias Training Series

Last spring IVALUE hosted an anti-bias foundational training series. There were a total of 65 participants who completed the series which included topics such as: Individual Identity and Perspectives (where we learned to recognize and understand bias), Creating Culturally Safe Community (where we gained background knowledge and understanding of the impacts of historical trauma on marginalized groups today), Interrupting Oppression (where we learned and practiced strategies to employ when confronted with oppressive behavior), and Making a plan (where we worked in grade level teams to talk about how we can take the information and skills learned to our school communities).

We focused on local trainers with expertise in diversity, equity and inclusion who also have the advantage of understanding our Missoula community. The trainers were: Empower MT, Indigenous Community Collaborative, and MTREP.

The training team is currently working on getting the foundational series scheduled for this year as well as developing a 2.0 series of training which will dive deeper into specific topics. The number of training participants is limited in order to create an environment best fit for learning, sharing, and processing these topics. The IVALUE team does not hold a waiting list for trainings, however, training dates and registration instructions will be announced when details are finalized.

Our Trainers

It was important for the IVALUE team to work with trainers who are experts in the fields of equity and inclusion, but also have a deep understanding of Missoula and the MCPS community. For that reason we focused on collaborating with local trainers or those with a close connection to our community.

We are so fortunate to partner with the following organizations to implement the IVALUE Anti-Bias Training Series. Each of these organizations and its staff are doing incredible work in our communities.

<https://www.themtrep.org>

<https://www.empowermt.org>

<https://www.indigenoussc.org>

Native American Heritage Month by the Native American Student Services Department

As we head into November many teachers look for ways to celebrate Native American Heritage Month in their classrooms. The MCPS Native American Student Services Department is happy to help! With a Native American Education Specialist assigned to each school our district has set the standard for implementing Indian Education For All (IEFA). Our department is passionate and eager to help teachers and staff. We can visit classrooms or help coordinate guest speakers, review classroom materials, and recommend resources and media. Please don't hesitate to contact the specialist assigned to your school.

In addition to the wealth of resources available on the Montana OPI website, they have also put together a resource guide specifically for Native American Heritage Month.

While November is the official month on our calendars, keep in mind that every month is Native American Heritage Month for the Native American Student Services Department and for our Indigenous students across Missoula County Public Schools. Consider how you can continue to celebrate and acknowledge Native American heritage throughout the year. Some suggestions include sharing: Indigenous history, contemporary issues, tribal language and stories, and notable Indigenous people throughout the year.

The Truth about Thanksgiving by the Native American Student Services Department

Thanksgiving has been celebrated as a holiday in the United States since George Washington was the nation's president. The holiday gained popularity over time as a time to give thanks, celebrate the fall harvest, and commemorate the supposed friendship established between the "Pilgrims and Indians" at Plymouth Plantation. The problem is that the story of the "first Thanksgiving" is a fabricated and romanticized version of history that ignores the truth about the genocide and forced removal of Indigenous people in the United States.

In classrooms across the country, and possibly within our own district children learn this false history and even re-enact the events with students dressing up and playing the parts of "pilgrims" and "Indians." When this happens not only are students misinformed but they are playing out stereotypes of Native American people. We strongly discourage these types of lessons and activities in any classroom.

Instead, we would like to encourage teachers to learn about and teach the true history of Thanksgiving or refocus their November lesson plans to topics like gratitude, food

sovereignty, and Native American history and culture. We have gathered the following resources and books that help correct the false narrative.

Resources:

- Rethinking Thanksgiving Celebrations: Native Perspectives on Thanksgiving
- What Educators Need To Know About Teaching Thanksgiving
- Oyate's List of Thanksgiving Books to Avoid
- Allyship with our Native Community (MFBCC Blog)
- Everyday Native

Books:

- If You Lived During Plimoth Thanksgiving by Chris Newell
- We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga by Traci Sorrell
- Giving Thanks by Chief Jake Swamp
- Thanks to the Animals by Allen Sockabasin
- (read by the Allen Sockabasin in Passamaquoddy Language)
- The People Shall Continue by Simon J. Ortiz
- An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Debbie Reese, and Jean Mendoza

[Hanukkah for Our Schools: A Brief Guide by Rabbi Laurie Franklin](#)

Hanukkah is called "Festival of Lights" because we light a special menorah (lamp) at home, called a "Hanukkiah" (hah-new-KEY-uh), for eight days in a row. In 2021, Hanukkah begins at sunset on Sunday November 28 and continues until sundown Monday December 6. Some people note that Hanukkah dates seem to move around; in fact, Hanukkah always begins on the 25th of the Hebrew month of Kislev. However, the Hebrew calendar and Gregorian calendar do not match, so Hanukkah's dates vary on the Gregorian calendar.

What is Hanukkah about?

Hanukkah means "dedication". The holiday marks the unlikely military triumph of a small band of hill fighters, the Maccabees, who drove the Syrian Greek army from Jerusalem and the surrounding territory (Second Century BCE). The great Temple of the Jews had been turned into a stable for the occupying army, so Hanukkah celebrates its reclamation and rededication.

Why eight candles?

The Rabbis of the Talmud tell a story about a miracle: The golden Temple lamp was an oil lamp, rather than a lamp of candles. When it was time to rekindle the Temple lamp for the rededication, the people found a single container of prepared oil, enough to light the lamp for one day only. But the lamp was intended to burn perpetually—all hours, all days—and it would take

eight days to prepare more ritual oil. Wonder of wonders, the single container of oil lasted eight full days!

Hanukkah customs: Food, Gelt, Dreidels, Presents

- We eat foods cooked in oil, such as potato latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (doughnuts), to commemorate the miracle of the oil.
- Hanukkah gelt: The word gelt is Yiddish for money. In Eastern Europe, people would give Hanukkah gelt to impoverished, young Torah (Hebrew Bible) scholars so they could get something special to eat and pay their teachers. These days, Hanukkah gelt refers to chocolate, foil-wrapped coins or gifts of money.
- A dreidel is a small top, spun by hand, that is used to play a game. When Torah study was outlawed by non-Jewish authorities, students would pretend they were playing dreidel games to evade detection. If they were accused of study, they would say, "We are only playing dreidel!" The dreidel has four sides, each with a Hebrew letter. The letters stand for the words, "A great miracle happened there." In Israel, the letters are different, standing for "A great miracle happened here".
- Presents? The custom of giving Hanukkah gelt also developed into gift-giving, perhaps in emulation of Christmas, but is not central to Hanukkah.

How to light a Hanukkiah

Each evening, we add one candle until, on the eve of the last day, we light all eight. We light the newest day's candle first, beginning at the right side of the Hanukkiah. In addition to the daily candles, there is a special candle, called the "shamus" (SHAH-muhs), whose role is to light the others. So, a proper Hanukkiah has nine candle holders. The daily candles are arranged at the same height, and the shamus might be either set to one side or in the middle of the eight, and might be at the same level of the other candles or higher.

A menorah with seven candle holders is not a Hanukkiah but is a representation of the Biblical seven-branched menorah of the ancient Jewish Temples.

We place the Hanukkiah in a window or in a wind-proof location (I light a Hanukkiah on my front porch in an aquarium with a lid). When the candles are burning, we celebrate by singing Hanukkah songs, playing dreidel, and enjoying food. When Jewish people live in places where it is dangerous for them to be open about their religious identity, the Rabbinic Sages said it is okay to light the Hanukkiah inside the house, away from public view.

How important is Hanukkah in Jewish practice?

Hanukkah is considered to be a relatively "minor" holiday compared to observances mandated in the Bible such as the New Year, the Day of Atonement, and Passover. It originated with the Jewish Sages, long after the codification of Torah. Nonetheless, through public menorah lightings and with its proximity to Christmas, Hanukkah has gained additional prominence. For

American Jews, it is a meaningful affirmation of identity at a time when most commercial activity focuses on the Christmas season. The magic of candle lighting in the darkest time of year is a beautiful reminder of the cyclical nature of the seasons and the wonder of creation.

How do you greet someone during Hanukkah?

"Happy Hanukkah" is the Standard English greeting.

Missoula MLK Day's Lynn Schwanke Youth Art & Essay Contest

Empower MT, The MLK Jr. Planning Committee, and the Missoulian present: Missoula MLK Day's Lynn Schwanke Youth Art & Essay Contest.

"We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor, it must be demanded by the oppressed."

Entry requirements: Submit a piece of 2-D art work or an essay, poem, or letter of no more than 250 words in response to the selected quotes above. Handwritten or typed essays will be accepted. Artwork may be any medium but no larger than 8.5 X 11 inches. *On the back of each entry, please include, the student's full name, grade category, school (if applicable), home address and home address and home telephone number.*

To enter you must be a youth (18 and under) in Western Montana. Entries are due no later than December 10, 2021. We will be accepting physical and virtual submissions this year. Please submit physical pieces to the Missoulian or virtual pieces to the link below. <https://forms.gle/3pFrz7FB8MmyNiFo7>.

Winners will receive a cash prize, be featured in the Missoulian and be recognized at the Missoula MLK Community Virtual Celebration on Monday, January 17, 2022.

Grade categories are based on: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12.

Submit to one of the following:

- MLK Contest, Missoulian, P.O. Box 8029, Missoula, MT 59807
- <https://forms.gle/3pFrz7FB8MmyNiFo7>

Questions? Contact Sierra Pannell at sierra@empowermt.org or (406) 541-6891.

What do you value?

The IVALUE team would like to thank you for taking the time to read through this newsletter. We hope that the content was informative, educational, and thought-provoking. Please feel free to connect with an IVALUE Leadership Team Member if you have questions or thoughts you'd like to share.

We also invite you to share topics and ideas for future newsletters. Our goal is for this newsletter to share updates and also become a resource. Let us know what you would like to learn more about.

You can find more information about IVALUE on our webpage at www.mcpsmt.org/IVALUE.

IVALUE Leadership Team

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