
Furthering DEI Work: Dismantling Systemic Racism in the Arlington Central School District
Theory of Change by Arlington Partners Against Racism 2024 Summer Interns

Background of Arlington Partners Against Racism

We are Arlington Partners Against Racism (On PAR), a group of action-oriented anti-racist community members, educators, and parents in Arlington Central School District (ACSD) dedicated to equity and institutional diversity. We amplify the voices, experiences, and needs of marginalized groups and people of color to ensure they are represented, understood, and responded to. As an organization, we strive to aid families, administrators, and educators with the common goal of achieving academic success and equality for all students within the school district. However, we recognize that achieving these goals requires acknowledging the pervasive and recurring instances of racism, bias, and discrimination experienced by students in ACSD, while also addressing the systemic factors that perpetuate these issues within the district. Our focus is on race and racism, and we affirm our collective commitment to creating and maintaining a district in which all members can thrive. To fulfill our mission statement and take strides toward dismantling systemic racism within ACSD, a Theory of Change must be applied to target educational inequalities through an understanding of their root causes and implement strategies toward positive, long-term impacts.

Key Phrases

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>Definition</i>
DEI Work	Abbreviation for diversity, equity, inclusion. Diversity acknowledges all the ways that people are different, such as sex and race. Equity is creating or allowing for equal opportunities and no barriers when it comes to advancement. Inclusion is the act of welcoming and supporting all individuals and groups. In promoting DEI work, schools recognize the different components of DEI and navigate similarities and differences so all

	community members can reach their full potential. ¹
Systemic Racism	Involvement of whole systems (ex. the education system) and its history and policies that perpetuate and reinforce racial inequalities in America today. Systemic racism includes both overt forms of racism and microaggressions. The broad term systemic racism encapsulates internalized racism, institutional racism, interpersonal racism, and other types of racism. Long-term effects of systemic racism include higher mortality and incarceration rates amongst people of color. ²
POC	Abbreviation for a person of color. A person of color is defined as someone who is not white. A person of color includes someone of mixed race. ³
DASA	Abbreviation for the Dignity For All Students Act. This New York State-mandated act provides students with a safe and supportive environment free from harassment, bullying, prejudice, or other forms of violence and discrimination on school property, school buses, or events involved with the school. ⁴

What is the Theory of Change?

Theory of Change is a strategy toward targeting a chosen issue by understanding its root causes, identifying long-term goals, and facilitating strategies and steps to effectively meet these goals.⁵ A Theory of Change approach helps execute action-based initiatives by outlining the challenges and underlying causes of broader issues. When issues are organized according to

¹ National Association of Independent Schools. (n.d.). Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. NAIS. <https://www.nais.org/articles/pages/diversity-equity-inclusion-and-belonging/#:~:text=What%20is%20DEI%3E,human%20differences%20within%20overarching%20similarities>.

² fairfightinitiative.org. (n.d.). Systemic racism. Fair Fight Initiative. <https://www.fairfightinitiative.org/systemic-racism/>

³ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Person of color definition & meaning*. Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/person%20of%20color>

⁴ The dignity for all students act (DASA). nyscfss.org. (n.d.). <https://www.nyscfss.org/the-dignity-for-all-students-act#:~:text=New%20York%20State's%20Dignity%20for,or%20at%20a%20school%20function>.

⁵ theoryofchange.org. (2023, July 19). What is theory of change?. Theory of Change Community. <https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>

prospective goals and applied strategies, the targeted issue is deconstructed by recognizing the challenges that must be addressed and identifying its underlying causes.⁶ This process also helps those executing initiatives better understand the nature of their targeted issue.

Evaluating Arlington Central School District’s DEI Work

The Arlington Central School District’s statement on ‘Belonging and Wellness’ promotes “safe, inclusive environments that support the mental, social and emotional well-being of all students,” which is displayed on their website’s ‘Board of Education’ page.⁷ However, when examining ACSD’s commitment to equity within the classroom and its platforms, inconsistencies and contradictions undermine the soundness of claims “supporting student’s emotional and social well-being.”

Through ACSD and its schools’ website pages, ACSD clearly does not hold equity and DEI work as a priority. ACSD’s main dashboard does not have a page dedicated to and titled ‘Equity’, which already foreshadows the district’s lack of commitment to DEI work. As of June 2024, only four out of the eleven schools in ACSD have a page specifically dedicated to ‘Equity’ on their school website pages. Out of these four schools, only Arthur S. May School and Titusville Intermediate School have information relevant to the 2023-2024 academic year. Although Arlington High School includes updated information about their My Brother’s Keeper program, the information and subpages within their ‘Equity’ page all date back to 2021. In addition, Joseph D’Aquanni West Road Intermediate’s ‘Equity’ page’s last newsletter is from November 2022.⁸ Furthermore, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) page on the district’s

⁶ A racial equity theory of Change. (n.d.).

https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/content/docs/rcc/RACIAL_EQUITY_THEORY_OF_CHANGE_08.PDF

⁷ Board of Education / Mission and goals. Board of Education / Mission and Goals. (n.d.).

<https://www.arlingtonschools.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=80>

⁸ Arlington Central School District / Homepage. / Homepage. (n.d.). <https://www.arlingtonschools.org/Domain/8>

website is invisible to the average website browser. The page is hidden beneath the ‘Department’ page and further concealed by the ‘Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment’ page. Within the ‘Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment’ page, the DEI is between two topics unrelated to equity.⁹ Due to these various factors, ACSD clearly does not hold equity within its district as a priority, and the lack of accessibility to DEI and equity resources within their schools demonstrates their inability to commit to supporting the district’s students, families, and community members.

The New York State-mandated Dignity for All Students Act (DASA), can not be properly upheld without commitment to and enacting policies related to DEI work. During focus groups and interviews with ACSD middle school and high school students of color through Vassar College’s “Equitable Futures: Action-Based Learning in Arlington School District” class, many students did not feel a sense of belonging, welcoming, or inclusivity in their school community. The commentary from these students is concrete evidence that DEI work is not properly implemented within the district. Moreover, although ACSD has a handbook addressing bias reporting (The Bias Incident Reporting Handbook), the resource lacks effectiveness. The practice of bias reporting is hidden on the district website on its ‘DEI’ page and is not a resource for students. Furthermore, the Bias Incident Reporting Handbook fails to address reporting biases that students may have witnessed among faculty members, which exposes another nuance that the district needs to address. Implementing legislation is one way of targeting ACSD’s patterns of systemic racism. Despite the New York State School Boards Association introducing policy work to increase DEI in schools,¹⁰ the implementation of these policies varies across the

⁹ Curriculum, instruction, Assessment / Diversity, equity, and inclusion. Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment / Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. (n.d.). <https://www.arlingtonschools.org/Page/24592>

¹⁰ NYSSBA sample policy 0105. (n.d.-b). https://www.nyssba.org/clientuploads/nyssba_policyupdate/sample-policy-0105.pdf

Arlington district. ACSD needs to write policy and provide resources that are more comprehensive, detailed, and thoughtful concerning DEI work and upholding DASA. ACSD needs to be held accountable to ensure that these policies are properly implemented within the district.

A lack of “Belonging and Wellness” and unavailable reporting resources within Arlington Central School District is further proved by a collection of student interviews regarding the reporting process within ACSD. Through interviews through the “Equitable Futures” class, students in the district described not knowing where and how to report discrimination or race-related issues. When attempting to report incidents of racism or discrimination, students felt hopeless about the effectiveness of their reports due to the lack of transparency within the reporting process.¹¹ Additionally, most students in the discussion were unaware of DASA, its policies, and how to access their reporting forms. Experiences shared in these group facilitations further prove that they do not feel supported by their reporting systems, as students shared incidents of racism and discrimination for which they never formally filed a report for.¹² These incidents are significant to ACSD’s lack of formal action against tackling a larger system of oppression. When students’ voices go unheard, especially surrounding acts of discrimination, a school culture is fostered that continues to ignore such cases. ACSD needs to address the hopelessness and lack of access to reporting systems among students of color in the school district.

These issues are furthered by a lack of diverse members of the ACSD staff. As of 2019, only 38 of ACSD’s 638 teachers (6%) identified as people of color.¹³ In comparison, the student

¹¹ ACSD students in discussion with an “Equitable Futures” class member.

¹² ACSD students in discussion with an “Equitable Futures” class member.

¹³ “Arlington Central School District Teacher Diversity (2018-2019),” NY Databases, Pressconnects, May 6, 2024, <https://data.pressconnects.com/ny-teacher-diversity/13/dutchess/131601060000/arlington-csd/>

body was 32% students of color in 2019.¹⁴ Through the “Equitable Futures” class interviews, one student of color in ACSD has articulated that they feel more comfortable reporting incidents of discrimination and harassment to an administrator of color.¹⁵ Hiring more diverse staff provides a multitude of benefits to students of color, such as role modeling, introducing culturally appropriate topics, and providing representation in positions of authority.¹⁶ Therefore, the district should focus on hiring people of color, especially placing an emphasis on hiring teachers and administrators.

After examining the ACSD’s commitment to equity and DEI work, On PAR argues that ACSD lacks a Theory of Change regarding implementing initiatives toward well-being and success for students. Additionally, ACSD’s commitment to “Belonging and Wellness” becomes more vague when considering a lack of priority regarding issues related to accessibility, policy work, reporting, and staffing. A lack of DEI initiatives, inaccessibility, patterns of underreporting, and a lack of diversity among ACSD teachers and administrators is undermined by a larger system of embedded systemic racism. Therefore, systemic racism may be combated through the implementation of a passionate and prioritized Theory of Change, which should outline larger issues through a map of initiatives and outcomes. When it comes to DEI work and ensuring equity in the district, student well-being should be addressed beyond the ‘Board of Education’ page of the Arlington Central School District website.

Arlington Partners Against Racism Theory of Change

¹⁴ 2019: Arlington CSD - enrollment data: NYSED Data Site. data.nysed.gov. (n.d.). <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2019&instid=800000053261>

¹⁵ ACSD student in discussion with an “Equitable Futures” class member, gender neutral terms used to maintain anonymity

¹⁶ David Blazar and Francisco Lagos, “Professional Staff Diversity and Student Outcomes: Extending our Understanding of Race/Ethnicity-Matching Effects in Education,” EdWorkingPaper 21-500, Annenberg Institute at Brown University, Providence, RI, 2021, 1. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED616814.pdf>

Our Strategic Focus

On PAR's Theory of Change will focus on these key points to target the inequalities that exist in the education system in ACSD and implement lasting impacts:

- Reviewing various district websites and our website to provide feedback to **improve resource accessibility and clarity**.
- Monitoring the **implementation of proposed policy solutions** within the ACSD Board of Education.
- Strengthening the **process of reporting instances of racism and discrimination** in schools.
- Creating **better hiring processes for staff of color**.

In-Depth Analysis and Steps of Our Key Points

Resource Accessibility and Clarity in ACSD and On PAR

On PAR aims to improve resource accessibility and clarity on websites in ACSD and our own website, onpararlington.org. On PAR wants to create a more user-friendly experience for those seeking equity resources and DASA information. In 2024, On PAR's Steering Committee reviewed both the district and individual schools' websites, and sent in a list of alterations that can be made to the administration.

Firstly, On PAR strongly suggests that ACSD's main dashboard should highlight an 'Equity' page dedicated to DEI work and ensuring equity. To follow up, the district's DEI page should be moved from 'Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment' to the newly established 'Equity' page. This adjustment assures that users seeking information and resources can easily access the information related to the district's DEI work.

To further improve accessibility, On PAR recommends that the district and each school appoint members of their faculty equity team to be in charge of updating their respective websites 'Equity' page, as well as collaborating with student equity teams on approving website information to ensure accountability and transparency with a larger community. Instead of the websites currently displaying outdated information, the equity team members should periodically update their website with pictures of DEI-focused events, future meeting dates and times of the equity teams, monthly newsletters displaying their progress addressed to the community, and visible contact information about both the equity teams and general "please contact" email addresses.

Reporting handbooks such as "The Bias Incident Reporting Handbook" and other resources that faculty and students can use to communicate instances of overt racism and microaggressions should be highlighted on each respective 'Equity' page. As seen throughout many student interviews in "Equitable Futures," students are unaware of the steps they can take if they encounter experiences with racism. This emphasis on resources can greatly bolster students' trust in the administration as well as provide evidence of the district furthering DEI work.

Lastly, On PAR's website is a resource that can be used to learn more about advocacy, systemic racism, and policies that protect students. While On PAR's website contains a lot of useful information, resources are not easily accessible due to the current website's layout. The 2024 summer interns for On PAR will redesign On PAR's website to ensure clarity and accessibility. Thus, On PAR's website can serve as a community resource in conjunction with the 'Equity' pages developed by ACSD.

Implementation of Proposed Policy Solutions

On PAR monitors and ensures the implementation of DEI and proposed policy solutions. One of On PAR's main focuses when it comes to dismantling systemic racism within Arlington Central School District is through policy work and review. Therefore, the organization is working to oversee that proposed DEI initiatives and similar research policy memos are put into place within its neighboring districts. On PAR recommends that ACSD be held accountable for their 'commitment' to DEI and student wellness by implementing equity policies and tracking that these policies are effective in Board of Education meetings.

Organized and accessible drafted DEI policies initiatives exist which On PAR urges the Arlington School District to adopt. The New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) Sample Policy 0105¹⁷ is a policy memo that offers clear and direct steps toward diversity, equity, and inclusion for students who have been historically marginalized within school districts such as ACSD. This policy introduces various inclusive education practices within curriculum, and initiatives toward hiring diverse staff, in addition to acknowledging ongoing systemic differences in school performance according to race. The NYSSBA Sample Policy 0105¹⁸ works to structurally reverse many of the issues embedded in districts such as ACSD. On PAR urges the district to adopt these DEI policies and ensure their effectiveness, in order to meet long-term goals of equity.

The Board of Education and the Superintendent district will monitor and review the district's metrics and equity activities to determine the extent to which district schools are complying with this policy, and the progress made toward attaining the goals of this policy.

¹⁷ NYSSBA sample policy 0105. (n.d.-b).

https://www.nyssba.org/clientuploads/nyssba_policyupdate/sample-policy-0105.pdf

¹⁸ NYSSBA sample policy 0105. (n.d.-b).

https://www.nyssba.org/clientuploads/nyssba_policyupdate/sample-policy-0105.pdf

Similarly, On PAR members regularly attend Arlington Board of Education meetings in order to supervise a commitment to DEI initiatives and ask questions regarding the implementation of similar policies.

On PAR is actively working toward the implementation of student-authored research policy memos, and is currently overseeing that these plans are put into action. Students of the On PAR-affiliated Vassar intensive course, “Equitable Futures: Action-Based Learning in Arlington School District,” researched and drafted policy memos addressing issues that directly affect historically underserved students and perpetuate systemic racism in Arlington. Using background gathered from ACSD student facilitations, Vassar students highlighted issues that are recognized in On PAR’s Theory of Change: a need to improve the hiring and retention of diverse faculty, strengthen DEI policies, and increase the accessibility and effectiveness of reporting racism and discrimination in ACSD. Using this gathered data, “Equitable Futures” students authored policy research memos and presented them to the Arlington Interim Superintendent, Paul Finch, and Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services, Jill Post. The On PAR team is monitoring the implementation of these policy solutions in order to continue tackling educational racism at a structural level.

Reporting Instances of Racism and Discrimination

On PAR has worked with students in “Equitable Futures” to facilitate meetings with ACSD students and strategize with them to address the problems they noted. In order to address the lack of accessibility of resources for reporting instances of racism and discrimination, On PAR supports the implementation of similar facilitations among staff and students within ACSD’s reporting process.

One of On PAR's goals toward educational equity within the Arlington School District is to pass a policy aiming at strengthening current student reporting systems: increasing the accessibility and effectiveness of reporting racism and discrimination in ACSD. On PAR advocates for redesigning Arlington's reporting structure for racism and discrimination to focus on a facilitated conference or a one-on-one meeting with staff members trained in victim-centered restorative justice facilitation tactics. Thus, support will be already integrated into the reporting process, ensuring that students' voices are heard and their concerns are addressed.¹⁹ Facilitated discussions with ACSD high school and middle school students opened many conversations surrounding the instances of racism, bias, discrimination, and harassment that they have encountered in the district. On PAR works toward pushing similar facilitation tactics within the reporting process with trained staff as a way of increasing support for students facing targeted issues and making reporting systems more accessible.

Public Agenda's guide toward "Addressing Incidents of Bias in Schools"²⁰ outlines the importance of facilitations regarding race and discrimination in schools as a way of supporting student wellness and mental health, but also to increase a school-wide knowledge of these issues. Public Agenda's report also offers guidelines for leading conversations surrounding race and discrimination which may be applied in one-on-one student reports. Applying these facilitation guidelines to the reporting process might clarify the steps that the district is making toward change for students. Additionally, teacher sensitivity toward incidents of racism has been proven

¹⁹ Policy memo constructed in Vassar College's "Equitable Futures" class
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1h3Hme6C-0i1j4MWxQF7VoE3kIhnCvLGh/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=108338509256620539300&rtpof=true&sd=true>

²⁰ Cabral, Nicole, et al. *Addressing Incidents of Bias in Schools*. A Guide for Preventing and Reacting to Discrimination Affecting Students. 2018. *Public Agenda*, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED594792.pdf>.

to increase engagement in school,²¹ and applying this sensitivity within the reporting process may also increase student comfort.

Better Hiring Processes for Staff of Color

One of On PAR's missions is to create better hiring processes within ACSD for staff of color. On PAR recommends that ACSD focus on hiring administrators, teachers, and retention.

To hire diverse administrators, ACSD needs to create Student Hiring Committees, review search firms, and appoint equity advisors, which not only allows ACSD to create a compelling argument for hiring but also greatly improves school climate and culture. In "Equitable Futures" student interviews, one ACSD student reported positive feelings about working on a student committee to hire the district's new superintendent.²² By incorporating students in the hiring process of administrators, prospective POC faculty will see hiring opportunities as more desirable and improve student connection to staff. Additionally, ACSD needs to ensure that the application process is equitable with search firms and equity advisors. By using a search form with a dedication to equity in their hiring process, ACSD will have a better chance to diversify their staff. ACSD should also appoint equity advisors to assist the district in hiring new administrators. ACSD should first contact Jeffrey Schneider, Vassar's Faculty Director of Affirmative Action, and ask to train ACSD's appointed equity advisors with Vassar's staff. After working with and observing Vassar College for three years, ACSD can begin leading its own training.²³

²¹ Bottiani, Jessika, et al. "Buffering Effects of Racial Discrimination on School Engagement." *Journal of School Health*, 2020. *Wiley Online Library*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/josh.12967>.

²² ACSD student in discussion with an "Equitable Futures" class member, gender neutral terms used to maintain anonymity

²³ Policy memo constructed in Vassar College's "Equitable Futures" class
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Hpokm1txhlwLoUpvyIilhWHenfZ2BiVo/edit?usp=sharing&oid=108338509256620539300&rtpof=true&sd=true>

To hire teachers of color in ACSD, the district should establish a Grow-Your-Own program, hire diverse administrators, and prioritize job-seeking applicants in underrepresented universities and districts. Grow-Your-Own programs are pre-professional programs that expose students and community members to pursue a career in education. ACSD should implement a program that allows students to write lesson plans and teach at the district's elementary schools, middle schools, and high school. ACSD can also apply for federal and New York State grants to help fund a Grow-Your-Own program. These grants include, but are not limited to, Title IIA, Teachers for Tomorrow, and My Brother's Keeper Grant Programs. Furthermore, ACSD should also focus on hiring administrators of color, which greatly improves the hiring and retention of teachers of color. Administrators often hire within their educator networks and they have an increased likelihood of knowing other POC education professionals.²⁴ Finally, ACSD can increase the diversity of its applicant pool by partnering with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions to connect with aspiring teachers from different ethnic backgrounds. This partnership will ensure equity as it allows underrepresented populations an opportunity to pursue an education career. ACSD can also reach out to New York City teachers, which has a large portion of teachers of color who are unsatisfied with their school's conditions.²⁵ On PAR suggests that ACSD reach out to New York City teachers through email and social media.²⁶

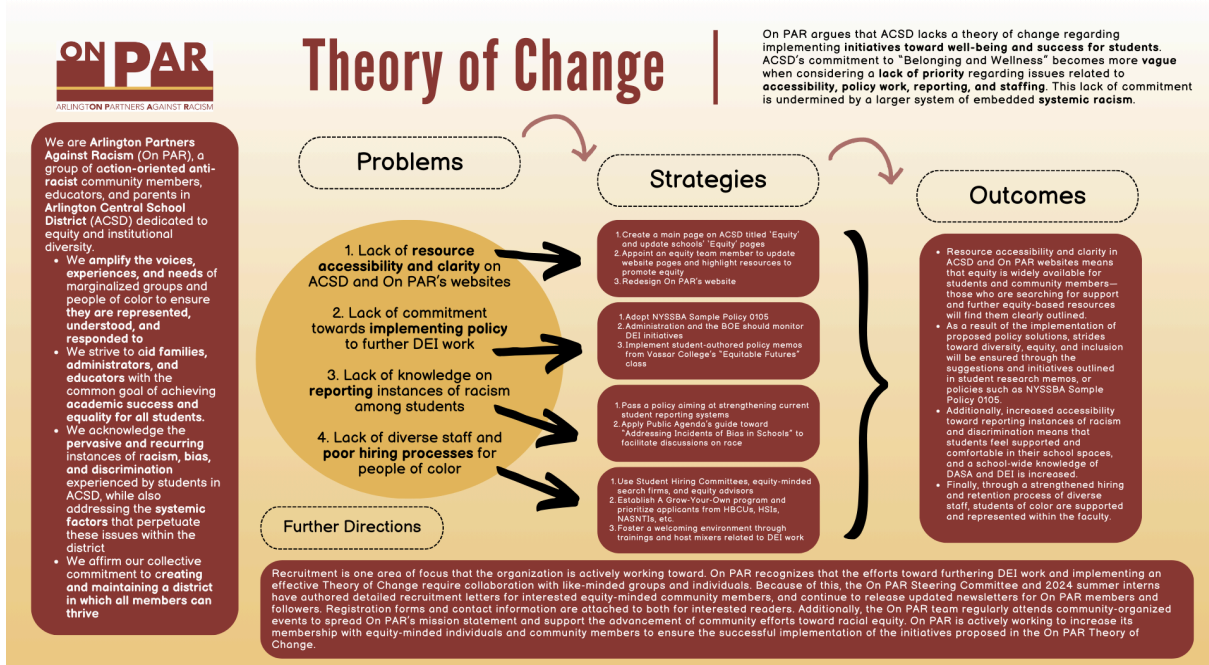
²⁴ Bartanen and Grissom, "School Principal Race and the Hiring and Retention of Racially Diverse Teachers," 1.

²⁵ Tracy Boyland, Miguel Martinez, John C. Lui, and Peter Vallone Jr. "A Staff Report of the New York City Council Investigation Division on Teacher Attrition and Retention to Members of the Committee on Oversight and Investigations." New York City Council Investigation Division. 2004.
<https://www.nyc.gov/html/records/pdf/govpub/1024teachersal.pdf>

²⁶ Policy memo constructed in Vassar College's "Equitable Futures" class
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ga4T5ckVXqTwazrk-Cp64JemO7UjZcOP/edit?usp=sharing&oid=108338509256620539300&rtpof=true&sd=true>

To retain these new hires and staff of color who are in the district, ACSD can foster a welcoming environment through professional development and host mixers related to DEI work. When interviewing a faculty member in ACSD as part of “Equitable Futures,” they stated that they felt unwelcome in their first years at ACSD. Their white colleagues intentionally looked away from them instead of smiling to avoid interaction.²⁷ Therefore, ACSD should incorporate mandatory DEI professional development training at the beginning of the school year for all faculty, to remind them of ways that their behavior can contribute to an unwelcoming environment. These trainings can also reinforce the support of inclusion for POC staff from administrators in the district. Moreover, the district could also hold educator mixers, which encourage community building, friendships, and inclusivity among ACSD staff.²⁸

Visual Representation of On PAR’s Theory of Change



²⁷ ACSD faculty member in discussion with an “Equitable Futures” class member, gender neutral terms used to maintain anonymity

²⁸ Policy memo constructed in Vassar College’s “Equitable Futures” class

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ga4T5ckVXqTwazrk-Cp64JemO7UjZcOP/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=108338509256620539300&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Outcomes and Further Directions

As a result of the proposed solutions in the On PAR Theory of Change, outcomes of educational equity will be achieved within ACSD. Resource accessibility and clarity in ACSD and On PAR websites mean that equity is widely available for students and community members—those who are searching for support and further equity-based resources will find them clearly outlined. As a result of the implementation of proposed policy solutions, strides toward diversity, equity, and inclusion will be ensured through the suggestions and initiatives outlined in student research memos, or policies such as NYSSBA Sample Policy 0105. Additionally, increased accessibility toward reporting instances of racism and discrimination means that students feel supported and comfortable in their school spaces, and a school-wide knowledge of DASA and DEI is increased. Finally, through a strengthened hiring and retention process of diverse staff, students of color are supported and represented within the faculty.

While Arlington Partners Against Racism has done much within the realm of ensuring equity for students within the Arlington school district, there are certain ways in which the On PAR Theory of Change may be implemented more effectively. Recruitment is one area of focus that the organization is actively working toward. On PAR recognizes that the efforts toward furthering DEI work and implementing an effective Theory of Change require collaboration with like-minded groups and individuals. Because of this, the On PAR Steering Committee and 2024 summer interns have authored detailed recruitment letters for interested equity-minded community members, and continue to release updated newsletters for On PAR members and followers. Registration forms and contact information are attached to both for interested readers. Additionally, the On PAR team regularly attends community-organized events in order to spread On PAR's mission statement and support the advancement of community efforts toward racial

equity. On PAR is actively working to increase its membership with equity-minded individuals and community members to ensure the successful implementation of the initiatives proposed in the On PAR Theory of Change.