

Bayside High School Case Study

Background Information

All the names used in this case study are invented.

Bayside. Bayside is a large city on the western coast of the United States. Bayside is home to one million inhabitants. In the 18th century, the Spanish settled in Bayside. As a result, there is a large Hispanic population. Because of its Mediterranean climate, the tourist industry, four universities, and large military base, Bayside has also attracted immigrants from all over the world. Various neighborhoods reflect that diversity. There is a French neighborhood, Chinatown, Spanish and South American quarter, and a large area where immigrants from Africa sell goods, live, and gather. Other nationalities are represented as well but in lesser numbers. To date, the population of Bayside is represented as follows: 40% of people are white, 30% Hispanic, 15% Asian, and 10% African American or from Africa with the remaining 5% being multiracial.

Bayside's economy is reliant on military activities, tourism, cellular companies, and highly rated universities. The city's real estate is thriving because of its location along the ocean, its climate, its flourishing job market, and its ability to accommodate people from all over the world. That being said, the booming economy has driven property prices up and made rent very expensive. As a result, the city started to see a high number of homeless individuals. These individuals have jobs but cannot afford to live in the city or on the outskirts. Drawbacks of living in the city include the horrendous traffic, over-crowded public transportation, and rising prices of food and services. Recently, more gang activities have been observed in certain neighborhoods due to the rising cost of living.

Bayside School District

The Bayside School District (BSD) serves 121,000 students from preschool to 12th grade. The district is led by a dynamic African American female superintendent who created a district improvement plan called Vision 2030. Vision 2030 aims to provide quality schools in every neighborhood to prepare all students for the competitive global economy. Vision 2030 is a community-based school reform that engages all parents, staff, students, and community members. The board of education is dedicated to seeing Vision 2030 through and will assess progress yearly towards the goals of the vision. Vision 2030 strives to create improved and broader measures of student achievement, develop schools as neighborhood learning centers, ensure effective teaching takes place in the classrooms, engage parents and community volunteers in the educational process, and facilitate communication and support among all stakeholders.

To achieve this challenging vision, the superintendent and her team decided to cluster schools by neighborhood so that there is continuity for the students who attend the neighborhood primary, middle, and high school. Cluster councils are charged to promote their schools in their community, and work with school, community, and district staff to improve the quality of their schools. Each cluster is comprised of community members, teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Although ambitious, this plan has given a voice back to communities, families, and parents. Community involvement had been missing in schools because the former superintendents wanted everything centralized. This cultural shift has been well received by school communities, principals, and parents, but barriers remain to genuine community involvement at some of the local schools, including Bayside Primary School.

Bayside Primary School

Bayside Primary School (BPS) is in a diverse, gentrified neighborhood in the city. The school is known for being the oldest primary school in the city. It serves 400 students from kindergarten to fifth grade. Student population is as follows: 35% of the students are White, 30% are Hispanic, 25% are African American or African while the remaining 10% are multiracial. The school has a large facility and yields good results on the state tests. The school has identified areas of growth, including providing more services for English Learners so that they perform better and involving the learners' parents and community. Parents work in the cellular companies, are a part of the military, own businesses, work in hotels or restaurants, and a few are university employees or professors. The average

salary of the parents is between \$55,000 and \$110,000. Families are generally generous in their contributions to the school. The school has 20 teachers, five assistant teachers, one cook, two janitors, one assistant principal, one nurse, and one special education specialist. Mrs. Brown is the current principal of the school.

The principal. Mrs. Brown is a 45-year-old bilingual White woman. Originally from France, Mrs. Brown immigrated to the United States at the age of 25. She obtained a bachelor's degree in International Business and Marketing from the Ecole Nationale de Commerce in Paris, France. Before moving to Bayside, she was a teacher for 10 years. Prior to that, she opened a charter school and was the principal of that school. She has been the principal at Bayside for four years now. Mrs. Brown has done a lot for the school over the past four years. She has led the renovations of the school, hired quality teachers, and fundraised over \$120,000 over the years to assist students and teachers with additional materials and resources. For example, she equipped each classroom with iPads, Apple televisions, and new furniture to encourage teachers to lead project-based learning activities. She has also provided regular quality professional development for her staff and teachers. Mrs. Brown is the chair of her cluster and is looking forward to reaching all the goals of Vision 2030.

The Case

During her recent yearly evaluation, the superintendent told Mrs. Brown that she needed to focus on engaging parents and community members in the life of the school. As a result of this feedback, Mrs. Brown volunteered to be the chair of her neighborhood Vision 2030 cluster in the hope of learning more about why parents do not get involved in BPS. For as long as she has been the principal, parents came and went, but there was no apparent desire to get involved in the life of the school. Parents would drop off and pick up their children, but only a few parents would help regularly. Mrs. Brown and her leadership team administered a survey to families in BPS. From that data, they realized that there were five to ten families who came to meetings, conferences, and coffee with the principal events. Mrs. Brown called another principal in the district and asked him for some advice on how she could involve families in the school. The seasoned principal shared:

What you need to do is get to know the parents, so you could have them tell you how they can help. Maybe you create a document with the parents' talents and interests and see how they can contribute based on that.

Mrs. Brown eagerly put all these strategies in place, but nothing changed. Parents were still not coming to school. One day while shopping in the community, she met a student who was with her father and mother. Mrs. Brown introduced herself and asked them if they would be coming to school for the upcoming coffee with the principal event. At that point, the parents looked at each other and said "We would love to come but we do not feel welcomed. We know you are trying but it is more complicated than just filling out a form and asking parents what they can do to help the school." Mrs. Brown was shocked to hear this after all the efforts she put into organizing events and translating documents in Spanish and Vietnamese, which were the two world languages represented at the school. Humbled by the parents' feedback, the principal asked what she could do to make the situation better. The family agreed to come to her office and talk about the matter further the following week.

Tuesday came and as promised, the parents met with Mrs. Brown. Mrs. and Mr. Mensah were an interracial couple. Catherine Mensah was from France and Mr. Mensah was from Ghana. They had been engaged for one year and the husband to be, Max, had been in Bayside for just a few months. The couple lived separately for two years while the immigration papers were processed and accepted. Mr. and Mrs. Mensah adopted their Ghanaian niece, Precious. Precious had been attending BPS for one year. The eight-year old was integrating very well at school, but her parents were not.

Mrs. Brown offered Mr. and Mrs. Mensah a beverage and proceeded by saying: Thank you very much for your time today. As you know, we are partaking in the Vision 2030. Engaging our families and community is a priority for me this year, so what can you tell me about your experience?

The parents took turns talking and shared: "Well, as you know, we are a newly engaged couple. We always assumed that in this type of good school, with lots of interracial couples and students, it would be easy to be part of the community, but it is not at all! In fact, we have been discouraged to come, attend meetings, or have a voice."

The parents sensed that Mrs. Brown was going to ask a follow-up question, so they went on: When we came to school the first few times, a few White parents started to tell me that I should not marry Max because he was Black. You know, Mrs. Brown, students talk, and Precious must have shared how her dad grew up. So, parents started to tell me that Max grew up poor, did not pursue an education beyond middle school, and was only after his green card since I am an American citizen. To be honest, I heard it all and I was fed-up to be bullied, judged, and insulted that way. These few parents are judging all of us interracial parents and that is why none of us come to school anymore. This kind of bias destroys a school culture and community. I would know because I teach about these issues in my classes at the university.

Catherine continued, "One parent had the nerve to ask me, 'If you get married, what would you two talk about?' Another person told me, 'You will have to help his family because that is what Africans and others do culturally. They come here, get a green card, and then bring their families.'"

Mrs. Brown tried to keep her calm demeanor but was ashamed of what was happening right under her eyes without her knowing. She could not believe that her school, the most diverse school in the district in which 20 countries were represented, would have such issues. The truth was that the principal knew the parents who were attending all the events well. She had not thought these parents would be capable of such actions. She knew them as well-intended parents and community members who wanted what was best for the school and the students. They had shown nothing but good intentions since they had joined the school. Feeling enraged, Mrs. Brown assured the Mensah's that she will put all her attention and energy into this matter. As a White immigrant, Mrs. Brown understood microaggressions and how it felt to be judged or unwelcomed because she had lived it herself when she first moved to Bayside.

That evening, after the teachers and staff had gone for the day, Mrs. Brown stayed late in her office and reflected on her own experience. She also brainstormed solutions to the existing problem on how to engage families at school. She felt that not only the well-being of the school was at stake, but also her job. The next day, Mrs. Brown called the Mensah's and thanked them for coming to her office the day before. She also assured them that she will come up with solutions and would love for them to be involved in the solutions. She pleaded to Catherine: "Our strength and wealth as a school is that we are diverse and our students can benefit from that asset in order to become culturally competent citizens who are compassionate, accepting, and advocates for differences." The principal asked Catherine if she and her husband would be willing to be members of the Vision 2030 cluster and share their experiences so that the cluster team could brainstorm solutions and establish an action plan. Catherine, though hesitant, accepted the offer. All the interracial families she knew wanted to be at school but preferred not to come in order to avoid microaggressions. They already encountered those in their professional and personal lives.

Conclusion

The situation at BPS is far from being resolved. Mrs. Brown and her team still must find solutions to foster parent and community engagement. The principal also needs to address the implicit biases prevailing at school. This teaching case study is relevant, and its solutions are applicable to many districts in the United States because implicit bias issues and parent involvement challenges are pervasive. The scenario presented in this case study highlights how difficult yet crucial it is to address biases to engage parents and build the community's cultural wealth.