

Quarterly Newsletter | May 2022

THE CATALYST

INFORM • EDUCATE • UPLIFT • SUPPORT

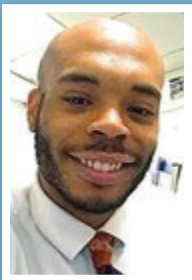
We're Glad You're Here!

Welcome to the first edition of The Catalyst, a quarterly newsletter for DCHS employees designed to inform, educate, uplift and support our professional and personal journeys as we work to identify, disrupt and dismantle structural and systemic racism.

Good Reads

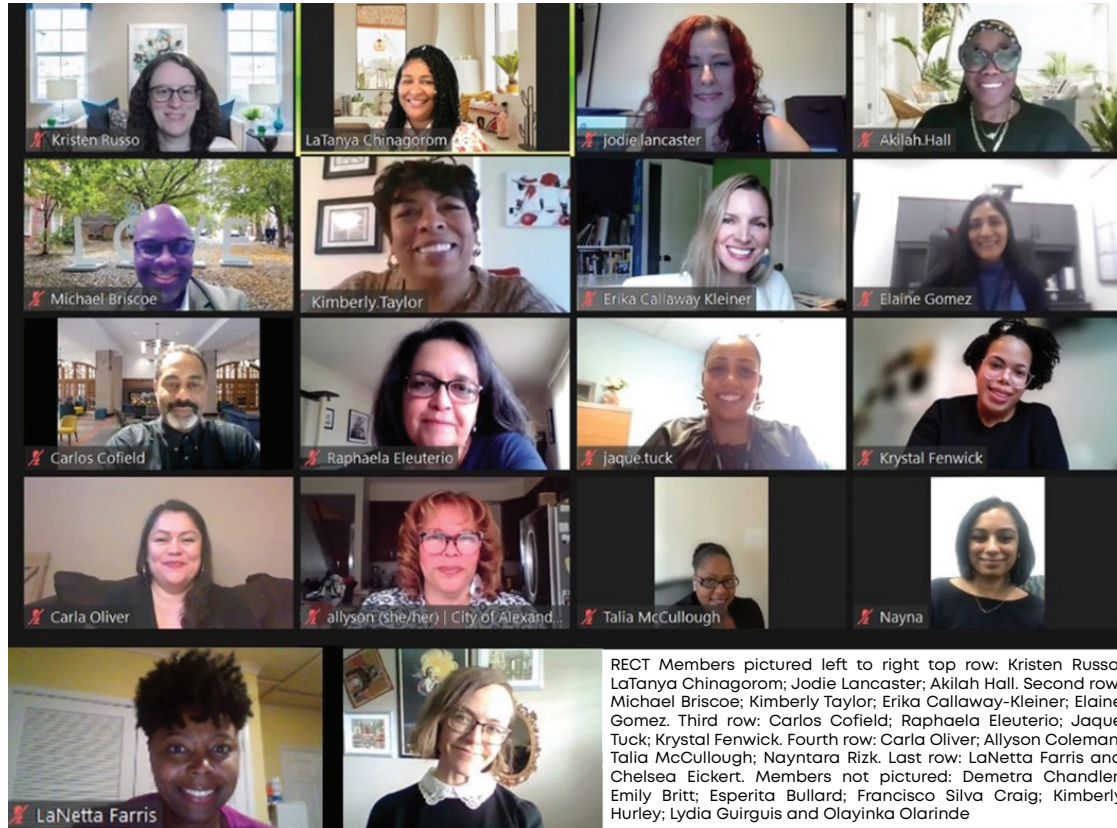
- *"The Origin of Others" (2017)* by Toni Morrison
- *"Racism: A Short History" (2015, original ed. 2002)* by George Fredrickson
- *"The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together" (2021)* by Heather McGhee
- *"White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism" (2018)* by Dr. Robin DiAngelo

The Marcus Alert Initiative



The Marcus-David Peters Act was signed by Governor Ralph Northam in 2020 to help in reforming the response to mental health crisis calls and reduce involvement of law enforcement when appropriate. Marcus-David Peters was a young, Black biology teacher who was killed by Richmond

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RECT Members pictured left to right top row: Kristen Russo; LaTanya Chinagorom; Jodie Lancaster; Akliah Hall. Second row: Michael Briscoe; Kimberly Taylor; Erika Callaway-Kleiner; Elaine Gomez. Third row: Carlos Cofield; Raphaella Eleuterio; Jaqu  Tuck; Krystal Fenwick. Fourth row: Carla Oliver; Allyson Coleman; Talia McCullough; Nayntara Rizk. Last row: LaNetta Farris and Chelsea Eickert. Members not pictured: Demetra Chandler; Emily Britt; Esperita Bullard; Francisco Silva Craig; Kimberly Hurley; Lydia Guirguis and Olayinka Olarinde

What/Who is RECT?

RECT is the acronym for the Racial Equity Core Team. RECT is championing critical anti-racism work in the City of Alexandria (CoA). In this work, we aim to identify and change inequitable practices, policies and systems to ensure that city residents and employees have an opportunity to benefit from and share resources and relationships equitably.

In September 2019, RECT was formed to lead this work under DCHS's Office of Organizational Development and Equity. RECT is a 20-member volunteer group of employees representing all four Centers across DCHS. The team is comprised of staff from diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences and represents various levels within the organization. In collaboration with Alexandria's **Race**

and Social Equity Office and the DCHS Leadership Team, RECT assists in normalizing racial equity work across the department.

The Racial Equity Core Team serves as the engine for change. One of the primary functions of is **capacity building** through education, learning and development.

RECT has facilitated trainings on structural racism and the role of government in advancing racial equity for all DCHS employees. Core Team members also provide holding spaces for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) employees and caucus group opportunities for healing, sharing, and mobilizing toward dismantling racism in all forms. RECT also serves as consultants for intradepartmental programs looking to normalize conversations

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What/Who is RECT?

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about race. Additionally, as the first City department to form a Racial Equity Core Team, RECT works with the City's Race and Social Equity Office to provide additional capacity to develop trainings, toolkits, definitions and much more.

RECT "C-Teams" Core Functions

- **Coordinating** (also known as the Strategic Planning Group): guides the work
- **Capacity Building**: facilitates learning and development opportunities; caucuses, holding spaces, offers consultations
- **Communicating**: manages communication to new employees, within RECT, and RECT newsletter
- **Cultivating**: engages in community outreach
- **Collecting**: performs data analysis, measuring and evaluating
- **Catalyzing**: assists with policy review and implementation Championing: engages in "racial and social justice and celebrating and sustaining success"
- **Championing**: engages in "racial and social justice and celebrating and sustaining success"

Highlights from Racial Equity Work

The following is information about what each "C-Team" is working on within RECT.

Coordinating Team

The Coordinating Team is partnering with the Leadership Team (LT) to implement action steps from the LT Commitment Statement. One of the action steps include reporting and responding to acts of racism and developing race-based complaint system.

The team was also instrumental in the development of the DCHS Workplan to address Equity Impact for every initiative and work being completed in the department. Racial Equity is a department wide initiative for DCHS. Chelsea Echard is spearheading the workplan to ensure it has all the elements needed to be effective (outcomes, accountability, etc.).

Capacity Building

In January, February and March 2022, successful BIPOC Caucus sessions were conducted on the first and third of each month. There were 7-19 participants in each meeting, and topics included the Dakota 38 and the three-part series on Colorism (Black, Latino, Asian).

Communicating Team

The Communicating Team provided an orientation for the new RECT members as well as the Government

Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) 101 training. The Team also reviewed the mission and duties of the committee and available resources, such as a RECT SharePoint site and GARE's web site. Lastly the Team developed this newsletter, which will be produced quarterly. The Team co-leads serve as ambassadors for the Core Team and present highlights on racial equity work in the Department at quarterly New Employee Orientations.

Cultivating Team

The RECT Strategic Planning Group will meet to discuss next steps for this team.

Collecting Team

The Collecting Team created and disseminated the first DCHS Employee Survey on Race and Equity in February 2022. The Team presented survey results at an Open Leadership Team meeting, which was recorded and is available [online](#). Survey Results Review Sessions were held over the month of April to allow staff to take a deeper dive into survey results, ask questions and provide input and suggestions on ways to move forward.

Catalyzing Team

The Catalyzing Team partners with the Policies and Procedures (P&P) Committee to hold monthly open P&P workshops. During the workshops, all committee members and policy authors collaborate to analyze one or two policies using a racial equity lens. The Catalyzing Team tracks feedback and recommended edits to the policies that could bring about equitable outcomes. The workshops are held on the third Thursday of every month on Microsoft Teams.

FOR BIPOC COLLEAGUES

BIPOC Holding Space

Holding Space was held in February for DCHS employees to process feelings associated with threats of violence to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). More than 14 HBCUs were threatened during Black History Month. Holding space was also offered in April in response to the Michigan police killing of Patrick Lyoya, a refugee who had come to the U.S. to escape violence in Congo.





In-depth interview with Kate Garvey, Director of DCHS

How would you describe your current thinking about racial equity, and how has your thinking changed since beginning Advancing Racial Equity work?

My current thinking about the racial equity work in the Department is that it continues to be critical for the health and well-being of our staff and of our organization and key to our effectiveness as we serve the community. I feel that, with the leadership of the Racial Equity Core Team and the efforts occurring in programs throughout the Department, we have made good progress. Is it enough? No. Do I believe we will continue to move forward? Absolutely. There is no question that we need more resources to fully support the efforts across the Department.

I would say that how my thinking has changed since we began this work is that I have a much better understanding of the magnitude of what we are trying to do and the level of resources that are necessary to move the work forward. I believe that the commitment and the skill of the Racial Equity Core Team members and their co-leads have enabled us to move forward far beyond what is reasonable with the competing demands they all face and the resources they have been given. We, in the Department and across the City, need to build the infrastructure of support that ensures this work will be successful and will endure.

What does it mean for you and all departmental leadership to have a commitment to racial equity?

For me, it means that we use all aspects of our positions and our influence to forward racial equity in the Department. It means that we are fully accountable for making or impeding progress. While we aspire to be a less hierarchical organization, by the very nature of our positions, we have the ability and the responsibility to impact the culture and the conduct in DCHS. Through our actions—learning, listening, responding, changing policies, holding people accountable—we demonstrate our commitment to racial equity. It is not enough to state our commitment, we must act upon it.

How have you demonstrated that commitment, particularly in your role as a Department Head with the City and DCHS?

I will say what I have tried to do, but I think it is for others to determine if I have demonstrated my commitment. With the City, I have tried to raise the issue of racial equity and the City's responsibility to keep it in focus and address it whenever I can. I have talked about our efforts in the Department to attempt to share ways that other departments could engage in the work. In the earlier days of these discussions, there was less awareness, but I would say with the leadership and efforts of the City Race and Social Equity Officer Jaqueline Tucker and the All Alexandria Work Group, there has been progress across the City.

With the department, I have tried to make clear my commitment by prioritizing this work, and ensuring that training, supports and other resources are available. By creating an expectation within our Leadership Team and managers that they focus and engage in the work, I have hoped to impact the norms and the culture of the organization. By building Racial Equity into our weekly Leadership Team meetings and integrating the focus of equity in budget and other key decisions—it becomes central, not extra.

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Equity in Action

ACPS Superintendent Hutchings focuses on racial equity in first-ever “State of the Schools” speech

ACPS Superintendent Gregory Hutchings gave the City's first “State of the Schools” speech to staff and families on March 1. He discussed new programs under the ACPS 2025 Equity for all Strategic Plan including offering free associates degrees to Alexandria City High School graduates through dual enrollment courses. One specific area of concern that Dr. Hutchings addressed is the graduate rate for Latino males. Dr. Hutchings also discussed counselor and social worker roles in assisting the community in addressing absenteeism and accessing available supports.

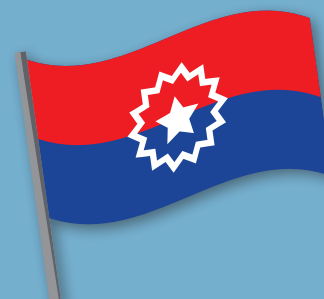
[READ MORE](#)



JUNETEENTH Freedom Day

On June 19, 1865, Union General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas. He informed the enslaved African Americans of their freedom and that the Civil War had ended. This momentous occasion has been celebrated as Juneteenth—a combination of June and 19—for over 150 years.”

—National Museum of African American Heritage and Culture



[LEARN MORE](#)



The Marcus Alert Initiative

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Police on May 14, 2018, while experiencing a mental health crisis. Community Services Boards around Virginia have begun developing this new system. The Alexandria CSB began a Marcus Alert technical group in November 2021, which includes RECT members Olayinka Olarinde and Elaine Gomez. A mission group has also been developed to include community members and other stakeholders in this critical work.

WHAT CHANGES WILL COME BECAUSE OF THE MARCUS ALERT?

This system will strengthen services for those in crisis by using a method that combines the expertise of licensed clinical professionals as well as law enforcement for a specialized approach when responding to behavioral health emergencies.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LEGISLATION?

Individuals with untreated mental illness are 16 times more likely to be killed during an encounter with law enforcement. The unfortunate stigma associated with seeking behavioral health treatment, especially in the BIPOC community, has also created barriers. The presence of law enforcement alone can escalate a situation. The Marcus Alert initiative is a direct response to address this issue.

READ MORE ABOUT THE MARCUS-DAVID PETERS ACT



ALEXANDRIA LAUNCHES MARCUS ALERT & NAMES CITY COORDINATOR



In-depth interview with Kate Garvey

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How does “The Groundwater Approach” impact your thinking about racial equity work and what other approaches influence your racial equity practice? What has prepared you to lead this work?

The Groundwater Approach is so relevant in a department such as ours—the evidence is clear as we look at the negative outcomes and inequities impacting those we serve, the vast majority being individuals who are Black and Brown. **GROUNDWATER APPROACH** >

In our field, I think we have come to realizations about the endemic and pervasive nature and impact of racism quite slowly given the significant manifestations of it we see each day, particularly with those we serve. Often, we have focused on the individual or family, without recognizing how systems are impacting all aspects of their lives.

I know that there are some members of DCHS who feel that I overemphasize racial equity and the impact of racism, but it is so central to the health, well-being, and success of those we serve and our staff, that it cannot be ignored or underestimated.

I believe that both how I was raised, and my social work education prepared me for this work. The level of discourse in my household pushed us to look at foundational issues, cause and effect, challenging pre-conceived notions, and acknowledging the inequities that were pervasive around us. In my education, we looked at systems as a rule and saw them as the key levers for making change. Searching out the root causes for disparities, poor outcomes, profound societal problems was our work. This has never left me and has driven me to pursue these efforts in DCHS today.

What does it mean to you to be an effective leader in an environment that has been built on structural, institutional and systemic racism? As a white woman leading racial equity work in DCHS, what challenges do you face?

I think that being an effective leader in this environment means that you begin by acknowledging your privilege to even be in the role and recognizing how you have benefited (as I have throughout my career) by the systems that favor Whiteness. From the beginning of my work life, I was given opportunities to lead efforts, frequently over/before my Black and Brown colleagues, many of whom had been working in the organization longer than I had. When I worked in a residential setting, with minimal experience and time in the job, I was offered a supervisory role. While I was pursuing my master's in social work, it did not mean that I had the skills and abilities that recommended me more highly than my coworkers who had been there for years. I use this as an illustration of both my benefitting from these systems and the numerous ways others have been passed by. As I have moved on and up through my career, I have always been keenly aware of these dynamics.

It is in that context that I grapple with how we as an organization perpetuate those practices or confront them. We have a tremendous opportunity and obligation to show how it can be different.

Through our actions—learning, listening, responding, changing policies, holding people accountable—we demonstrate our commitment to racial equity.

—Kate Garvey



DCHS Employee Racial Equity Survey Results

DCHS gathered employees' responses to thirty-eight questions related to race and equity by customizing the GARE Employee Equity Survey. Items focused on employees' perceptions of their experience, perspective, and individual work; DCHS leadership, infrastructure, and tools; workforce equity; and racial equity in the community. Two hundred forty (240) DCHS staff (around 35 percent of our workforce) participated in the survey with 199 completing the entire survey (67 supervisors and 132 non-supervisors). The survey results will serve as a baseline from which we can measure progress over time.

Most respondents agreed about the importance of examining and discussing the impacts of race. Our respective comfort in discussing race, however, is less so. Analysis of the open-ended comments revealed the following themes: action and accountability; the need for more conversations regarding inequities experienced by diverse ethnicities/cultures; communication; capacity/resources; and workplace culture. Survey comments also noted several successes.

The following areas of focus were identified:

- Increasing comfort around talking about race
- Applying a racial equity lens to programs, policies and practices
- Providing access to racial equity tools
- Increasing communication to share efforts/ progress/successes more broadly
- Ensuring supervisors and managers have the capacity and capability to lead racial equity work
- Increasing representation of Latino/a/x or Hispanic staff at the management level
- Engaging in more conversations about inequities across ethnicities/cultures
- RECT held Employee Review and Feedback Sessions to hear staff input, thoughts about survey results and suggestions for future surveys. The Core Team will disseminate a survey report that will include information garnered in the feedback sessions.

How to Deconstruct Racism, One Headline at a Time

In April 2019, Baratunde Thurston delivered a TED Talk on the phenomenon of white people calling the police on Black people simply living their lives (aka #LivingWhileBlack). It explored the weaponization of white supremacy, the deadly consequences of policing, and the power of language to write a better narrative for us all to inhabit.

Baratunde Thurston is a writer, comedian and activist. He holds space for hard and complex conversations with his blend of humor, wisdom and compassion. Baratunde is an Emmy-nominated host who has worked for The Onion, produced for The Daily Show, advised the Obama White House, and wrote the New York Times bestseller **How to Be Black**. He's the creator and host of **How To Citizen with Baratunde** which Apple named one of its favorite podcasts of 2020 and for which he received the **Social Impact Award** at the 2021 iHeartRadio Podcast Awards. He's also a founding partner of the new media startup **Puck**. In 2019, he delivered what MSNBC's Brian Williams called "one of the greatest **TED** talks of all time." Baratunde is unique in his ability to integrate and synthesize themes of race, culture, politics and technology to explain where our nation is and where we can take it.

On Baratunde's website, you can find the talk, video Q&A, supporting materials, ways to support his continuing work, and a link to subscribe to **Baratunde's newsletter** "Get inspired. Laugh. Read a story. Become a better person. Guaranteed."

BARATUNDE'S WEBSITE >



Upcoming Training Opportunities

Participate in the Racial Equity Tool Focus Groups

As a part of its commitment to equity, the City of Alexandria's Race and Social Equity Office is initiating the creation of a Racial Equity Tool specific to the City of Alexandria to help with applying a racial equity lens to every aspect of how we serve the Alexandria community. Government and community organizations across the country are using Racial Equity Tools to ensure more equitable decisions for historically and systemically marginalized populations.

The vision for our Racial Equity Tool is to provide a framework and a foundation for all institutions in the City of Alexandria to operationalize racial equity in all decisions, policies, programs, and practices. This tool will be a process and a product that Council and government staff as well as community partners systematically use to promote racial equity and center the needs, leadership, and expertise of residents and staff of color with lived experience of inequities.

The success of this tool is not possible without feedback from City employees who provide services to the Alexandria community every day. The City of Alexandria is requesting input from employees in the development of our Racial Equity Tool so we can best meet the needs of the workforce and the community we serve. Please provide your input by participating in a City employee focus group **OR** completing a 15-minute survey.

COMPLETE 15-MINUTE SURVEY



There will be future opportunities to participate in focus groups to discuss the development of a Racial Equity Tool. Please register in advance to attend and provide feedback.

If you're unable to attend one of the focus group sessions, please take 15 minutes to complete the survey to provide recommendations. **The deadline to complete the survey is Friday, May 20, 2022.**

Your input is imperative as we work toward developing this tool. Your responses and recommendations will shape the creation of our Racial Equity Tool to help us promote racial equity in our work so we can better serve and meet the needs of ALL Alexandria.

For questions and additional information about the Racial Equity Tool, email the Race and Social Equity Office at equity@alexandriava.gov.

Bias and Microaggressions Training (Virtual):

- Friday May 20, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
- Thursday May 26, 1 - 4 p.m.

Dates for the Advancing Racial Equity: The Role of Government trainings will be announced in July 2022.

For more information about RECT or to share comments or suggestions, contact co-leads allyson.coleman@alexandriava.gov or nayntara.rizk@alexandriava.gov.

