

Fort Lee Let's Include

Q&A

Check out our website: FortLeeLetsInclude.com

Contact Us: FortLeeLetsInclude@gmail.com

Q.) What is *Fort Lee Let's Include*?

Fort Lee is a pretty special place to live. There are a lot of reasons why, and diversity is one of them. 73% of our students are from minority communities.

Fort Lee Let's Include is a community action group that works in partnership with our community, school district, and Board of Education to bring greater diversity and representation to leadership positions across our school district.

Fort Lee is a special place to be - and our strength is in our diversity!

Q.) Why does representation matter?

Representation means that **teachers, staff, principals, other educators, administrators, and leadership** reflect the student body in the schools they serve. Research shows that diverse school leadership creates higher expectations and better student outcomes in elementary, middle, and high schools.

But don't take our word for it, check out the research. A 2018 Johns Hopkins University study showed just how much representation matters. The research team showed that Black students are 13% more likely to enter college if they had at least one Black teacher by the third grade. The likelihood of college enrollment more than doubles (32%) for Black students with at least two Black teachers in elementary school, according to the study.

Representation matters too for Boards of Education. A study from Florida State University, for instance, showed that with more diverse school boards, the disparity between suspension rates for students of color (often much higher) and white students (often much lower) was significantly reduced.

Furthermore, representation can result in priorities, policies, curriculum and equitable support for students of all backgrounds.

Q.) Why is the initial focus of this group on increasing representation on the Fort Lee Board of Education?

Leadership matters. The Fort Lee Board of Education is charged with governing the Fort Lee School district. Currently the Board is made up of 90% white/caucasian members. They oversee a district of 73% minority kids. We know the Board of Education cares about diversity, equity and inclusion, so let's work in partnership with them and our community to help make our Board of Education reflect the kids in our schools.

Q.) Are you trying to push out current members of the Board of Education?

No - we are asking the sitting members of the Board of Education to more proactively be Champions of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. One way they can do this is to be passionate advocates for increasing representation on the Board of Education. What does this mean exactly?

- **If a sitting Board of Education member runs for re-election**, they can run in partnership with candidates of color, sharing resources and networks.
- **If a sitting Board of Education member does not plan to run for reelection**, they can leverage their resources and networks to support candidates of color.
- **If a sitting Board of Education member has already served 10+ years**, consider stepping up by stepping down, esp. Those members who have served for so long are in a great position to plan for their legacy and begin now to identify and support candidates of color who would increase representation of our district.

Q.) The Board of Education positions are elected. Isn't the problem that there are no candidates of color running for election?

Leadership matters, and many newly elected members of the Board of Education in recent years have been encouraged to run and supported by sitting members of the Board of Education. For the November 2022 elections, two sitting Board of Education members and one new candidate are running as a slate, i.e. this means, they are running together on a common platform sharing election resources and signs -- you will see their 3 names together on one sign. All candidates are white/caucasian.

In other words, the current Board of Education members can play a pivotal role in encouraging, supporting and sharing resources with incoming candidates, and in recent years, the vast majority of incoming candidates they have supported have been white candidates.

We know the sitting Board of Education members care about diversity, equity and inclusion, and we are asking them to continue to show their support by doing even more to grow diversity on our Board of Education.

Q.) Doesn't focusing on representation stress how we are different/not alike? Does it divide our community?

Increasing representation doesn't divide our community, rather, it INCLUDES more people with different backgrounds and experiences in positions of power -- bringing more of our community together.

Q.) Is the Representation on the Board of Education the only focus of the group?

Representation on the Board of Education is a priority for our first year (2022-2023). We also look forward to partnering with the District's administration to support greater diversity, equity, and inclusion across our staff and teachers.

Q.) Why should people who aren't people of color care about increasing representation in leadership positions in our school district?

There's nothing to lose by increasing representation and diversity in our district. In fact, there's so much more to gain as a community. Research suggests that diversity drives innovation — more of our district's students will see improved outcomes, improving the overall achievement of our district as a whole.

Questions/Comments? Contact Us at FortLeeLetsInclude@gmail.com