

Transcribed Video Dr. Morse w. Rachael Blansett

Hi everyone, this is Superintendent Jim Morse to my right is Rachael Blansett who has been hired as our new ORCSD DEIJ Coordinator. She has been introduced to you in writing by me, she has been introduced to you in writing by the students and we thought that we would take a different approach and introduce her via video.

Let us start our conversation with Rachael.

JM – Rachael, give us a sense of who you are and your background?

Rachael – So absolutely, I grew up outside of Detroit Michigan to a single mother and one brother. I am the first child in my family which I think has a lot of responsibility on top of being a first-generation college student. So, it was really emphasized in my home to value academics and to value education and so I ended up being the first person in my family to go to college to not only get my Bachelors degree but also my Masters degree. Throughout that work I have been doing DEIJ work since I started my undergraduate career whether that was working with cultural and identity centers, supporting marginalized students, facilitating trainings and dialogues and throughout my professional career I only been able to hone in a those skills a bit more and grow within network.

JM – Thank you, Rachael. So, Rachael went through a comprehensive interview process, she applied for the position, there were sixteen people who finished their applications, six of whom were chosen to be interviewed. The interview committee was made up of parents, community members, teachers, and students as well as administrators. She ended up going through two rounds of interviews one with the DEIJ Committee representatives and another with the community a week later and also the various staffs throughout the District. She came through that process as the recommended number one candidate. I spent approximately six hours with her over two meetings just getting to know her and checking her references. Her references were stella.

Rachael as we move to this next phase where you are an employee can you speak more deeply about the work you have done you mentioned earlier DEIJ and how that would apply to a K-12 setting?

Rachael – Absolutely, throughout my academic and professional career, I have been able to as I said facilitate different dialogues around various social justice topics, lead trainings and professional development for faculty, staff, and students, and I have also been able to teach classes, and able to work with community organizations in terms of doing DEIJ work. Among a myriad of other things and so within that although my background has been predominately within higher education, I've been making efforts to really pivot into K-12 work and more community centered work because it has always been really important to me and so currently, I am working with a Maine School District within their anti-racism task force alongside creating trainings and professional development for their faculty and staff. Within that I am hoping to not only bring a fresh perspective and new skills to Oyster River, but I am also hoping to continue to learn how to grow within DEIJ work within this role.

JM – Thank you. The job was created because we recognized in Oyster River that there were gaps in our curriculum that we really did not know how to address age-appropriate programming for our

students and the DEIJ Coordinator position was really created to help our teaching staff in providing professional development and closing those gaps in our curriculum. Helping our marginalized populations, whether those populations were based on poverty, or sexuality, or religious differences, or gender identity or color. This position was really created to support our teaching staff and **Rachael you produced some podcasts that have caught our district population attention. Can you talk to us about when they were created and what their intent was? I know that part of what has caused our communities attention is the language specifically that can come across as coarse and vulgar. Would you address those?**

Rachael – Yes, definitely the concerns are valid, and I am happy to address the question. Just to give a little context the podcast was created by me and my best friend, and it was after we were graduating graduate school and embarking on our professional journey in our careers and not only served as a way for us to maintain relationship in connection with one another, but I think that the other piece was that we really wanted to provide a space and a platform to talk about the racialized experiences that we had as black woman within academia and within life and within our profession. We are really trying to use it as a platform to raise awareness and hold different dialogue and discussions around these different topics that impact the black community, but specifically black woman, and so speaking from our own lived experiences but also inviting different guests and different folks within our own networks to engage in these dialogues to learn more. With any form of media and content it is not for everyone, and I think folks should listen or engage with their own discernment at this time.

JM – I think that the biggest concern that I am hearing Rachael is that you would bring that kind of language or those types of podcasts into the school District. Can you address that?

Rachael – No, absolutely not. At this time as we said this was a personal and creative outlet and at this time, we started the podcasts back in grad school and that is no longer where we are at so from here on out, we will not be doing a podcast anymore.

JM – The issue of reappropriation of language I think that some of this was a misunderstanding especially when it came to the picture of you and your T-Shirt. Can you talk about the movement of Reappropriating language?

Rachael – absolutely, in terms of reappropriating language, are reclaiming terms we look at it from historically a lot of terms have been used to either shame or certain communities or certain folks that identify in certain ways and has been used historically as derogatory in nature and so reappropriating language is a way for those communities and those folks that identify in those ways to really reclaim that language or term for their own empowerment and to really refrain the narrative around their identity. An example of that could be queerness, in thinking about how historically the term queer was used to identify as you as different or you were weird so very used in shaming derogatory ways. Now, we see with the LGBTQ+ communities a lot of folks are actually reclaiming that term for themselves to use it as a term validating their experience.

JM – Let us go back to the public-school setting, Rachael. Oyster River is one of four school systems in the state, Exeter, and Manchester and Phillips Exeter Academy that have DEIJ Coordinators, tell me about how you would build a network for this work in our school system.

Rachael – Absolutely, I think, and this is one of the things that I emphasized throughout my interview process, building relationships and community and networks within the communities is really important to me and I think through that and building relationships we can effectively do

DEIJ work but also within that we can think through public forums, we can think through small group dialogues and discussions together. I am already thinking about cultivating resources to help teachers within the classrooms support their students while doing DEIJ work. So, there are a myriad of different ways that we can really embed this within the school District and how we support the community within this work, and I am hoping to be able to do that through the relationships that we build with folks.

JM – So this is intended to be a brief introduction to Rachael. **Rachael what thoughts do you want to share with the greater Oyster River community in terms of your coming on as our DEIJ Coordinator on August 1st?**

Rachael – Absolutely, number one I am really excited, and I am really hoping that folks are just as excited to engage with this work as much as I am and really hoping to as I said build those relationships, that community, those connections because without all of us really investing within this work it is not going to be as effective to get done so I am really hoping to do this work with you all.

JM – This brief video is really just to introduce you to Rachael and let her share with all of you what her qualifications are and major goals for the job and we look forward to having additional conversations with Rachael as we work together over the coming school year.

Thank you.