We are Kittery: working together for a bias and harassment-free culture

A NH Listens Summary Report

**A community conversation
hosted by
Kittery School Department &
Kittery Community Center
*with support from New Hampshire Listens***

December 4, 2017

Background

On December 4, 2017, almost 100 people gathered at the Kittery Community Center for a community conversation on creating school and community culture free of bias and harassment. This event was planned in partnership with the Kittery School Department, with support from New Hampshire Listens. There were 7 trained facilitators and a moderator at the event, with 7 breakout groups. In the first part of the evening, participants were organized by role into students, school staff, and parent/community members. After this initial conversation, participants worked in mixed groups to share what they talked about and identify common themes. The findings in this report are based on the emerging themes identified from all of the groups (summarized in Appendix A). The data analysis from participant evaluations is available in Appendix B, and the discussion guide is attached in Appendix C.

Emerging Themes

Emphasis on training

Many groups identified training as a necessary aspect of moving forward with conversations around bias and harassment. This includes training students, school staff, and community members. This will allow development of a 'common language' and common wording to use around these topics. Participants mentioned that students should have opportunities for training within the school setting, but also by attending conferences or workshops. Students can then become leaders on these issues and offer peer education. In the school setting, many mentioned that conversations on diversity and culture often begin in elementary school, but then disappear. A long-term investment to incorporate diversity into the curriculum was discussed. This will also require extensive training for teachers around difficult conversations surrounding race and identity. Participants discussed the necessity of being 'comfortable being uncomfortable' and leaning into discomfort – that the idea is 'scarier' than the actual conversation. Parents and community members expressed interest in learning more about having these conversations in a home setting. In all of these discussions, facilitation was mentioned as being very important. Diverse and experienced facilitators that ensure youth voices are heard were discussed as an important facet of training.

Enhancing diversity in the school and community

Increasing diverse representation was an additional concern of participants at the conversation. Some participants noted that there should be efforts to recruit more diverse teachers in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, background, and religious affiliation. Allowing for this representation in the school, and also throughout the community, will normalize diversity. Some also mentioned that difference should be viewed as an asset, and the community should celebrate diversity.

Small school/community culture can be an asset and a challenge

Although many participants noted in their introductions that they truly enjoyed the historic and 'small town feel' of Kittery, it also was presented as a challenge. Some mentioned that there is a neighborhood feel, but it can also create stronger resistance to change. It might also make it harder for people to speak up. The small setting could potentially cause issues to stay on people's minds longer, such as in the case of the girls soccer team kneeling during the national anthem.

Some discussed how they always feel safe in Kittery, but others questioned whether that was true for everyone and what might cause this difference. Making stronger efforts to reach out to parents who feel disenfranchised and to those who do not feel heard were both mentioned as potential solutions.

Finally, social media was discussed as sometimes creating an unbalanced environment. The Kittery Facebook page was brought up as not always being a respectful setting. Going forward, some participants suggested encouraging face to face contact whenever possible, and prioritizing civility.

Recommendations for moving forward

After having these small group discussions and highlighting emerging themes, there are a few recommendations for moving forward. First, many participants noted that continuing these conversations and dialogues would be important. There should be an ongoing emphasis on establishing common ground and active listening. Others noticed that there might have been too much agreement in the conversations and wondered who was not in attendance and why. As a solution, they suggested reaching out to those who they know have differing opinions. A conversation surrounding social media, including its assets and also how it can cause misunderstanding, was also mentioned.

In order to encourage stronger attendance at these conversations, especially among students, some suggested holding them before or after large school events, such as basketball games. In these conversations, student voices should be incorporated and they should feel as though their input matters.

Training was a definite priority amongst participants in the conversation, in terms of developing opportunities for students, parents, school staff, and community members. Within the school, some suggested making an effort to diversify staff and looking more deeply into how lessons on diversity can be incorporated into the curriculum of all grades. This might include conversations on historic examples of systemic racism.

In terms of community, offering events that encourage the celebration of diversity was mentioned. This might include multicultural fairs, parades, the performing arts, or even a book club. Some participants mentioned developing a process in order to make new residents to the town feel welcome. Finally, adding a statement about inclusivity to the historic Kittery sign was mentioned as a step to display the town's commitment to celebrating diversity.

Appendix A
Summary of Emerging Themes

- **Emphasis on training**
    - Training teachers to have these difficult conversations – surrounding race, identity
        - Be comfortable being uncomfortable
        - Lean into discomfort – the idea is 'scarier' than the actual conversation
    - Allowing students to become trained within school setting but also by attending workshops/conferences as field trips
        - Peer education
    - Training parents and community members to have conversations and being able to have discussions at home
    - Ensuring conversations have very experienced facilitators
        - Remembering practice is very important
        - Diverse facilitators
        - Ensure youth voices heard – sometimes students don't feel like their opinions matter as much
    - Start these trainings earlier
    - Good emphasis on lessons in culture and diversity in Kindergarten and through elementary school years, but then it disappears?
        - Make a long term investment to incorporate diversity into curriculum
    - Maybe come up with a 'common language' and common wording to use surrounding these topics

- **Enhancing diversity in the school and community**
    - Recruiting more diverse teachers – in regard to gender, race, ethnicity, background, religious affiliation
        - One of the schools does not have a lot of male teachers
        - Not a lot of diversity in staff
        - Not a lot of diversity in terms of faith groups represented in the community
    - Normalizing diversity
    - Celebrate diversity – treat difference as an asset

- **Small school/community culture can be an asset and a challenge**
    - Small setting makes issues stay on people's minds (ex: girls kneeling during soccer game)
    - Neighborhood feel, but makes change difficult
    - There can be a lot of resistance to change
    - Social media creates an unbalanced environment
        - Make sure there is civility
        - Encourage face to face contact whenever possible
        - The Kittery Facebook page is not always respectful
    - Historic town
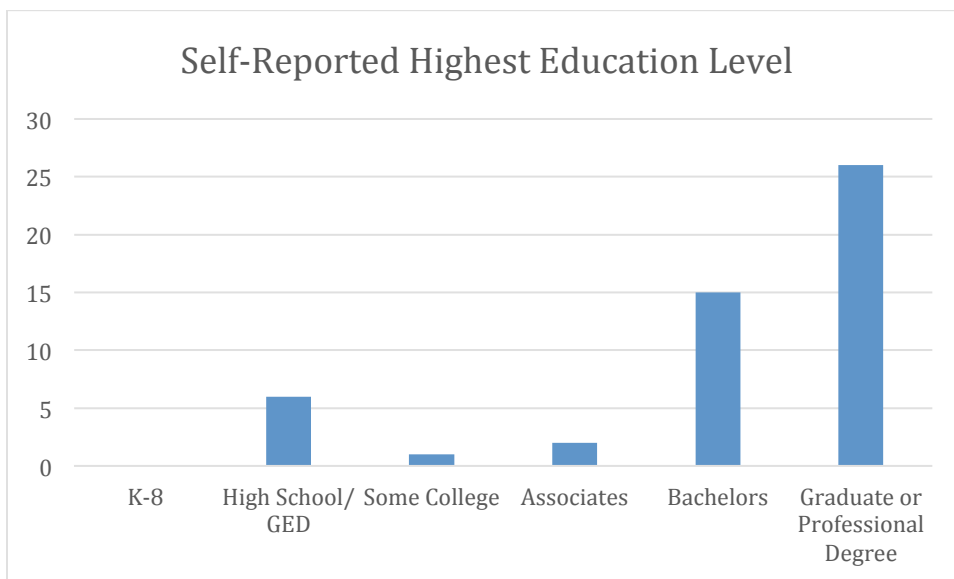   - Some always feel safe in the town, recognize who does not and why

- More outreach to those who don't feel heard
- Outreach to parents who feel disenfranchised
  - Some people don't want to speak up due to small setting – how do we 'stir it up?'

- **Recommendations for moving forward**
  - Continue these conversations and dialogues
    - Too much agreement – who isn't here and why?
    - Reach out to those who have differing opinions
    - Consider having them before/after large school events, such as basketball games, to encourage attendance among students
    - Emphasis on common ground, active listening
  - Focus on developing training opportunities for students, parents, school staff, community
  - Make effort to diversify school staff
  - Enhance community events that encourage celebration of diversity
    - Multicultural fairs
    - Parades
    - Performing arts
  - Look at curriculum
    - Where can diversity be incorporated?
      - Relevant history of systemic racism
    - Incorporate through all grades
  - Conversation around social media – its assets and how it can cause misunderstanding
  - Listen to students – make sure their opinions are incorporated and that they feel like they matter
  - Develop a process for making new residents to Kittery feel welcome
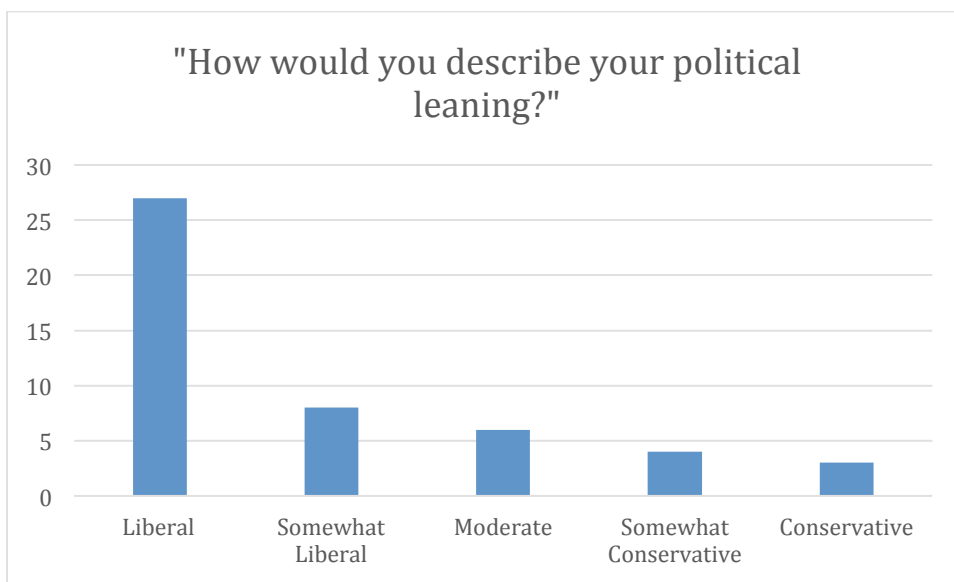 - Add a statement about inclusivity to the historic Kittery sign

Appendix B
Evaluation Data Analysis

- Approximately 94 people attended, with 57 pre-registered.
- There were 7 facilitators at the event. In the first section of the discussion, participants were split up by their role: student, parent or community member, or school staff. The second half allowed participants to join mixed groups to share and discuss common ideas/next steps.
- Of the 94 participants, <u>51 evaluations</u> were filled out (approximately 54%). This was mostly due to a rush at the end and the fact that the copies available exceeded projected estimates.
- Of those filling out evaluations, ages of participants ranged from 15 to 66 years old. The average age was 45, and the median age was 47 years old.
- There were more women than men at the event, with 61.2% women and 38.8% men.
- 94% of those filling out evaluations identified as White/Caucasian.
- Although there was a range of education levels, the majority of participants held a Bachelors degree or Graduate/Professional degree (82%) (Figure 1).
- 12.5% of participants identified as Moderate, about 14.5% identified as Conservative or Somewhat Conservative, and about 73% identified as Liberal or Somewhat Liberal (Figure 2).
- Approximately 98% of participants stated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that the conversation was valuable.
- Participants were somewhat divided on whether the conversation allowed them to understand points of view different from their own. About 63.8% of participants stated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that they now have a better understanding of points of view that are different from their own, with about 36.2% disagreeing (Figure 3).
- 89.6% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that because of the conversation, they are more likely to become involved in the community in the future.
- Approximately 94% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they met and talked with people from their community that they didn't know before, throughout the conversation (Figure 4).
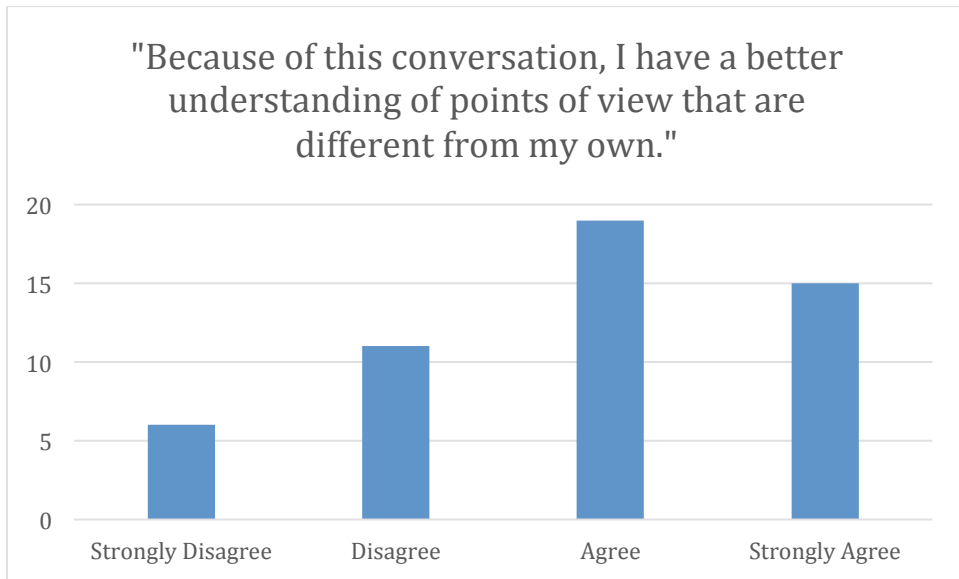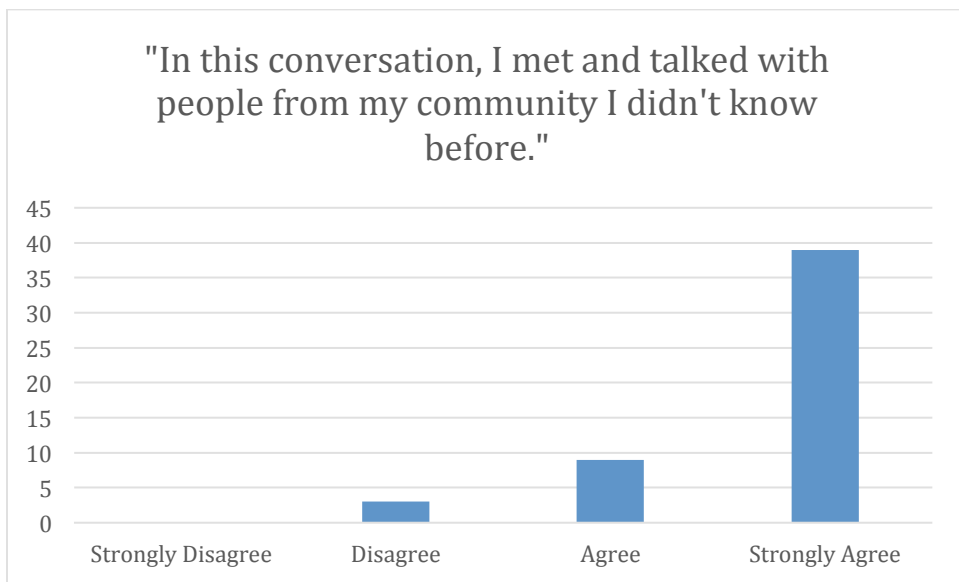
Figure 1

Self-Reported Highest Education Level

Figure 2

"How would you describe your political leaning?"

Figure 3

"Because of this conversation, I have a better understanding of points of view that are different from my own."

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6	11	19	15

Figure 4

"In this conversation, I met and talked with people from my community I didn't know before."

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	3	9	39

We are Kittery

How can students, parents, community, and staff work together to create a safe, respectful, and healthful culture free of bias and harassment?

A community conversation
hosted by
Kittery School Department
Kittery Community Center
December 4, 2017

With support from New Hampshire Listens
www.nhlistens.org

5:30	**Sign-in and refreshments**
6:00	**Welcome and purpose**
6:15	**Small group conversations**
7:45	**Small group summary reports**
7:55	**Next steps**
8:00	**Closing**

What is New Hampshire Listens?
New Hampshire Listens is a civic engagement initiative of the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire. NH Listens works to strengthen New Hampshire communities by helping citizens participate directly in discussions about policies that affect their daily lives. Established in 2011, we engage state residents in local, regional, and statewide conversations on a broad range of topics to bring about informed, innovative solutions to complex issues. At the core of our work, we organize fair, nonpartisan discussions throughout the state, help communities establish their own local Listens organizations, and train facilitators for public engagement. If you are interested in more information, we look forward to you being in touch with us. We are always looking for thoughtful facilitators and local contacts in NH communities. Find us at: www.NHListens.org

This guide is the same for all participants and facilitators. The facilitators will help guide the conversation but we are all responsible for making sure the group is productive. Thank you! Welcome and thank you for joining today's conversation ~

We welcome ALL members of the Kittery community to this evening of conversation to address some of the challenges in our schools and community. We want to hear from you. What has been your experience? Is everyone treated fairly in our community? What are some concrete actions we can take to make Kittery as welcoming and inclusive as possible?

Please note: We are delighted to have this event covered by the press and local bloggers and want to balance that with a participant's ability to express an incomplete or experimental thought as a part of this process. We respectfully request that all representatives of the news media (formal and informal) identify themselves at the registration table and ask permission to tape, photograph, identify, or quote an individual participant directly. We are happy to answer any questions about this request.

Detailed Outline

5:30   Registration and Refreshments
  ➢ Welcome and sign in at registration table
  ➢ Please find your small group circle to meet your facilitator and fellow participants

6:00   Welcome and Overview of the Conversation
  ➢ Welcome from Eric Waddell, Superintendent
  ➢ Moderator: Bruce Mallory, NH Listens

About the process: This conversation is—

- Designed to focus on what is important to *you* related to the ways that Kittery and its schools create a welcoming, inclusive environment. Our purpose is to support community leaders charged with assuring the safety and well-being of all our residents.
- Designed for participants to be here the whole time (do what you need to do to be most present; feel free to take a break or step outside for a phone call if needed).
- About a constructive focus and looking forward to desired actions and solutions.
- Intended to increase input and information on complex decisions being made by our community leaders.
- Organized to allow the greatest possible time for everyone to both speak and listen, which is why we use small facilitated groups where ideas can be explored, differences understood, and preferences for action expressed.

➢ Group agreements for a productive conversation;
- Share air time
- If you disagree, consider asking a question rather than arguing to prove your point
- It's OK to disagree, but don't personalize it. Stick to the issue, not the person who is disagreeing with you
- Speak up if the process doesn't seem fair
- Speak for yourself, not for others and not for an entire group (use "I" statements)
- Personal stories stay in the group unless we all agree we can share them outside of the group
- We all share responsibility for making the group productive
- Be respectful and use respectful language
- It's okay to bring up topics related to race and class
- Respect the facilitator's role
- Listen first.

6:15 **Introductions in small groups—We will begin the evening with "shared roles" in small groups made up of students, staff, and parents and community members. You will meet first with others who are like you.**
➢ Your small group has a neutral facilitator whose role is to:
- Help with the process and keep time,
- Serve as a reminder of our agreements to be fair and respectful,

- Make sure everyone gets a chance to participate, and
- Record key information

➢ Introductions: Please share your:
  - Name, a hat or two you wear in the Kittery community, and one thing you love about living or working in Kittery

6:30   **Sharing our experiences**
➢ Think about the overall question tonight, *How can students, parents, community, and staff work together to create a safe, respectful, and healthful culture free of bias and harassment?*

➢ Take a few minutes to review the data on page 6 from the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey about the experiences of students at Shapleigh Middle School and Traip Academy. What does this data tell you about how middle and high school students' experiences and views about safety and respect in their schools and community? (whole group discussion, 10 min.)

➢ Now make a few notes for yourself in response to these questions—(5 min.)
  - Have I ever felt disrespected or unsafe in our community?
  - What is one thing I would change about Kittery to make sure everyone feels safe and respected?
  - What is one thing I would want to stay the same about Kittery to be sure everyone feels safe and respected?

➢ Turn to someone sitting near you (someone you don't know) and share with her/him some of the ideas you just wrote down. (5 min.)

➢ Now turn to another pair.   The four of you compare your ideas. What did you hear in common? What did you hear that was unique? (10 min.)

➢ In the whole group, list the common ideas that emerged. What patterns do you notice? What are some actions that would lead to a culture free of bias and harassment? (10 min.)

7:10   **Mixing it up**
➢ Find the "season table" that corresponds with the season of your birth (winter, spring, summer, fall). This table should now be made up of a mix of folks, including students, parents, staff, and community members.

➢ Start with quick round of introductions—share your name and a hat or two you wear in the Kittery community. (5 min.)

➢ In round robin style, go around the circle. Each person address the question—

- What did you hear in the first conversation that you would like to share with this group? Keep it brief.
- Repeat this again, so each person has two chances to share. (10-12 min. for two rounds)

➢ Whole group discussion—given what we have heard, *What are 2 or 3 specific actions in our schools and community that would lead to safe, respectful, and healthy lives for everyone in Kittery?* (12-15 min.)

7:45   **Report Outs**
➢ Each group will be asked to provide a VERY BRIEF summary of their most important findings and recommendations. If you are asked to speak for your group, please be brief and share what has been compiled *by your group*, including common ground and divergent views. (You will have two minutes for each group!)

7:55   **Next Steps—Kittery Civil Rights Advisory Council and Kittery Schools civil rights teams**
Mat Kiernan

8:00   **Closing**

Thank you for participating!

Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey

		Shapleigh Middle School		Overall Maine Average	
		2017	2015	2017	2015
Have you ever been bullied on school property?	Yes	43.7%	38.5%	46.3%	47.6%
Do you agree or disagree that in your community you feel like you matter to people?	Agree	56.6%	45.1%	62.6%	55.8%

		Traip Academy		Overall Maine Average	
		2017	2015	2017	2015
During the past 12 months, have you ever been bullied on school property?	Yes	15.3%	20.2%	21.9%	23.9%
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "I feel safe at my school."	Agree	93.5%	90.2%	88.9%	88.6%
Do you agree or disagree that at least one of your teachers really cares and gives you help and support when you need it?	Agree	80.4%	80.2%	81.5%	79.9%
How often does your school enforce rules fairly?	Most/always	44.3%	31.7%	48.6%	48.1%
How often do adults in your School address conflict, negative language, and bullying in positive Ways to help students?	Most/always	30.3%	23.7%	34.2%	34.0%
Do you agree or disagree that in your community you feel like you matter to people?	Agree	57.8%	43.6%	57.3%	51.3%