

## PTA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) December Newsletter

Welcome to the PTA DEI committee's first newsletter! We are initiating a monthly newsletter based on feedback we received from the community in response to the needs assessment survey that was distributed to RFES caregivers. The sections below are first steps in addressing some of the feedback. Click on the section title below to jump to the section(s) of most interest to you.

[Actions YOU Can Take](#) are actionable items, often in our community, that you can take to promote DEI efforts.

[Recommendations](#) provide DEI resources (e.g., books, museums, social media) that you might find helpful for yourselves and to share with your children.

[RFES Faculty Equity Committee Updates](#) keep you posted on what RFES faculty DEI efforts. They are looking for volunteers to present at the RFES Cultural Diversity Day on Feb. 14<sup>th</sup> (more details below).

Please contact us at [dei@rodgersforgepta.org](mailto:dei@rodgersforgepta.org) if you have any questions or concerns about anything below, have suggestions for the newsletter, or are interested in joining the RFES PTA's DEI committee.

Join us for our next meeting on Thursday February 8<sup>th</sup> at 6PM.

### **Actions YOU Can Take:**

A boundary study committee has formed for BCPS to deal with overcrowding at schools in our area (such as Hampton Elementary). In Spring 2024, the Board of Education will consider and take action on the committee's recommendations, including holding a public hearing. We believe this is an opportunity to return the Rodgers Forge Apartments, which are literally across the street, back to RFES. This will add diversity and draw more open, inclusive boundaries to the school catchment area.

The boundary study committee put out [this survey](#) for community members to vote.

The Current Options as we understand them are:

Option A - includes RF apartments and Yorktown Drive

Option B - map 8, option A plus area across York near Ascension Lutheran Church

Option C - No Yorktown drive, Adds RF apartments, Rodgers Choice, Armagh Village and Cloisters

Option D - Minus Yorktown drive, Plus RF Apartments

The survey will run until December 17.

There is also a section [on the webpage](#) where you can let the boundary study committee know the importance of returning the Rodgers Forge Apartments to RFES, as the options are not set in stone. Please [visit the webpage](#) and add comments, such as "Please return the Rodgers Forge Apartments to Rodgers Forge Elementary."

Information for those if you concerned about overcrowding at RFES:

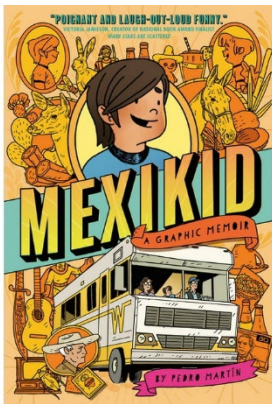
- RFES is currently at 380 students, with our stated capacity of 411. Our pre-Covid numbers were 470 and we fit comfortably in the school.
  - The apartments would currently add around 32 students.
  - If we go below capacity, we run the risk of losing teachers. With decreasing numbers, staff numbers must go down as well.
- What about adding Pre-K?
    - Right now, we have classrooms that go unused on certain days and two trailers that are empty. We don't plan to return to the days before West Towson was built when we had 9 trailers, but our school functions well using two trailers.

### **Recommendations:**

Below is a list of books and other media recommendations. Although reading a book may not solve deeper issues of inequity, exposure to three dimensional characters from diverse backgrounds that your child can relate to, may increase empathy and offer insight into the lives of people with different lived experiences. Plus, they are just great books! What are you reading? Did you visit a museum that you really enjoyed? We would love to include your recommendations in our next newsletter. Email us at [dei@rodgersforgepta.org](mailto:dei@rodgersforgepta.org).

### **Book recommendations:**

Mexikid: A Graphic Memoir. Pedro Martin

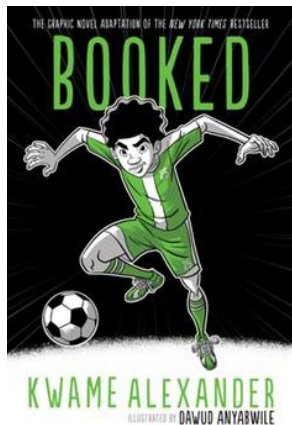


Pedro Martin has grown up hearing stories about his abuelito—his legendary crime-fighting, grandfather who was once a part of the Mexican Revolution! But that doesn't mean Pedro is excited at the news that Abuelito is coming to live with their family. After all, Pedro has 8 brothers and sisters and the house is crowded enough! Still, Pedro piles into the Winnebago with his family for a road trip to Mexico to bring Abuelito home, and what follows is the trip of a lifetime, one filled with

laughs and heartache. Along the way, Pedro finally connects with his abuelito and learns what it means to grow up and find his grito.

Review from a 9 year old. “The story is about a kid going to Mexico with his family to bring his abuelito to America and find his abuelita’s grave so they can save it from sinking soil. He finds out the secret to love (a big hat) and finds that money isn’t the most important value. Along the trip, he learns that anyone can have big feelings and it will be fine. I recommend this book because it was lol funny and was so sad and so happy at the same time.”

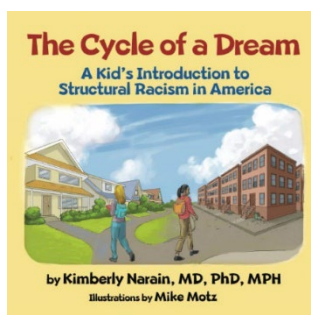
### Booked – Kwame Alexander



Twelve-year-old Nick is a soccer-loving boy who absolutely hates books. In this graphic novel version of *Booked*, the follow-up to the Newbery Medal–winning novel *The Crossover*, soccer, family, love, and friendship take center stage as Nick tries to figure out how to navigate his parents’ divorce, stand up to a bully, and impress the girl of his dreams. These challenges—which seem even harder than scoring a tie-breaking, game-winning goal—change his life, as well as his best friend’s.

In this electric and heartfelt follow-up to Newbery Medal–winner *The Crossover*, soccer, family, love, and friendship take center stage as twelve-year-old Nick learns the power of words as he wrestles with problems at home, stands up to a bully, and tries to impress the girl of his dreams.

### A Cycle of a Dream – Kimberly Narain



Throughout America's history, people from all different backgrounds and racial groups have worked together to overcome racism and bring America closer to equal opportunity for everyone. But the effects of structural racism are still felt today in many ways, and people need to continue to work together to help make the American Dream a reality for everyone.

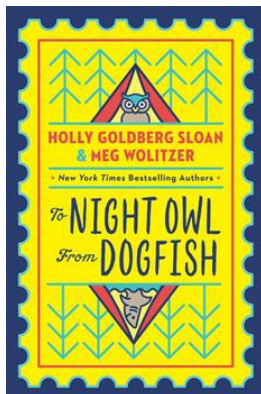
### **Audio Book recommendations:**

The Best at It by Maulik Pancholy



From award-winning actor Maulik Pancholy comes a hilarious and heartfelt middle-grade debut about a gay Indian American boy coming into his own. Rahul Kapoor is heading into seventh grade in a small town in Indiana. The start of middle school is making him feel increasingly anxious, so his favorite person in the whole world, his grandfather, Bhai, gives him some well-meaning advice: Find one thing you're really good at and become the *best* at it.

To Night Owl From Dogfish By Holly Goldberg Sloan and Meg Wolitzer



Avery Bloom, who's bookish, intense, and afraid of many things, particularly deep water, lives in New York City. Bett Devlin, who's fearless, outgoing, and loves all animals as well as the ocean, lives in California. What they have in common is that they are both 12 years old and are both being raised by single, gay dads.

When their dads fall in love, Bett and Avery are sent, against their will, to the same sleepaway camp. Their dads hope they will find common ground and become friends - and possibly, one day, even sisters.

But things soon go off the rails for the girls (and for their dads, too), and they find themselves on a summer adventure that neither of them could have predicted. Now that they can't imagine life without each other, will the two girls (who sometimes call themselves Night Owl and Dogfish) figure out a way to be a family?

### **Places to Go:**

**From the Visit Baltimore website:**

Get your free BoP Pass and discover Baltimore's Black museums, restaurants, shops and other cultural and historical attractions throughout the city—exploring over a few hours or a few days. Celebrate Baltimore's deep [African American history](#) and [heritage](#), as home to influential leaders such as Thurgood Marshall, [Frederick Douglass](#), Billie Holiday and, at one point, Oprah Winfrey (she still loves our crab cakes!). Get lost in cultural institutions and landmarks like the [National Great Blacks In Wax Museum](#), the [Frederick Douglass-Issac Myers Maritime Park Museum](#), the [Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture](#) and so much more to learn all about the history of influential authors, musicians and leaders. Plus, get exclusive offers at some of our [Black-owned businesses](#). See and do it all with one easy pass that the whole family will enjoy.

<https://baltimore.org/bop-pass>

### **Social Media Recommendations:**

Raquelmartinphd on Instagram - Assistant Professor [@tennstateu](#)  
Host [@mindyourmentalpodcast](#)  
Mental Health & Social Justice

Her list of picture books recommendations:

Thank you Omu by Oge Amura [@oge\\_mora](#)  
Happy Hair by Mechal Roe [@mechalroe](#)  
Cool Cuts by Mechal Roe [@mechalroe](#)

Saturday by Oge Mora [@oge\\_mora](#)

Tallulah the Tooth Fairy CEO by Dr. Tamara Pizzoli [@tamarapizzoli](#)

Little Trouble Maker Makes a Mess by Luvvie Ajayi Jones [@luvvie](#)

What Will I Be by Jayla Joseph [@jayla\\_joseph\\_books](#)

The King of Kindergarten by Derrick Barnes [@authorderrickdbarnes](#) & Vanessa Brantley

Newton [@vanessabrantleynewton](#)

How to Read a Book by Kwame Alexander [@kwamealexander](#)

Harlem Grown by Tony Hillery [@tonyhillery](#)

ABC Engineering Book by Dr. Natoshia Anderson [@the\\_nerdy\\_stem\\_queen](#)

Brown Boy Joy by Dr. Thomishia Booker [@melaninmommy](#)

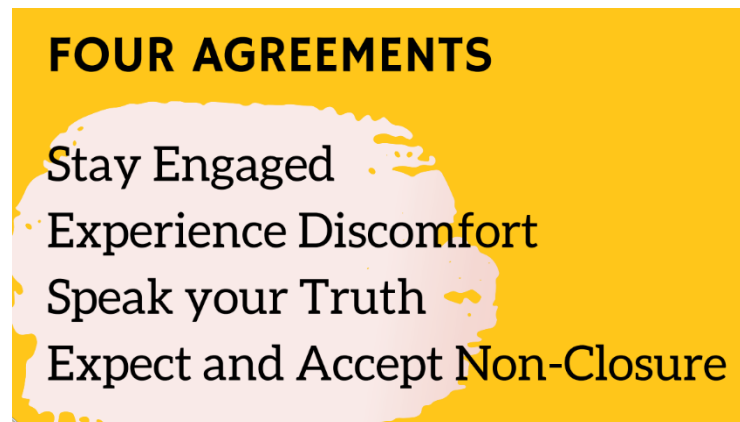
B is for Breath by Dr. Melissa Munro Boyd [@melimunro](#)

[racialequityinsights](#) on Instagram

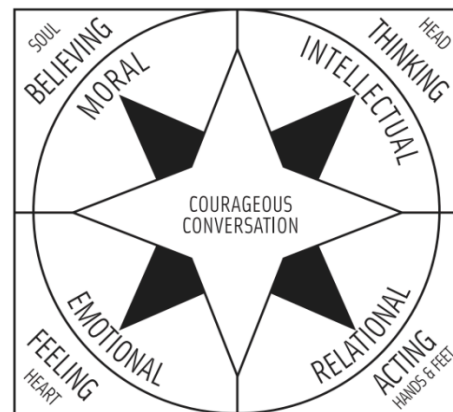
I'm Tony! I help organizations advance anti-racism via holistic and intersectional strategies.

## RFES Faculty Equity Committee Updates:

In October, the RFES Equity Committee presented to the faculty about how to have Courageous Conversations using the Equity Compass and Four Agreements. Following this protocol allows our faculty to have meaningful discussions around the topic of equity. For more information about Courageous Conversations, you can visit <https://courageousconversation.com/>.



The Courageous Conversation Compass



\*We are looking for volunteers to present at the RFES **Cultural Diversity Day on Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>**. Please contact your child's teacher, or Mrs. Lee at [slee5@bcps.org](mailto:slee5@bcps.org) if you are interested in presenting to a class. More details will be coming soon.

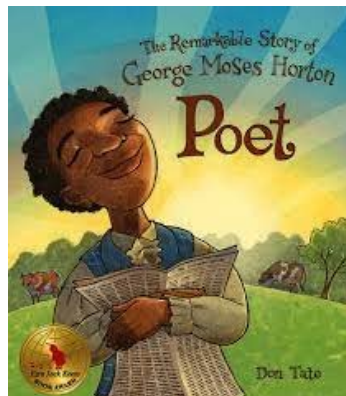
Our RFES Equity Liaison, Mrs. Lee, attended the **Maryland Cultural Proficiency Conference** at Morgan State University. At the conference, she attended sessions on LGBTQ & You and Navigating Cultures of Nice, in addition to hearing keynote speakers addressing the topics, Calling In the Call Out Culture and White Emotionality and its Role in Education. She got to network with other educators from around MD about equity, including Mx. Mooney, former RFES School Counselor Intern. Mrs. Lee presented to the RFES Equity Committee about her experience and will share at the next DEI Meeting on Thursday, Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>.

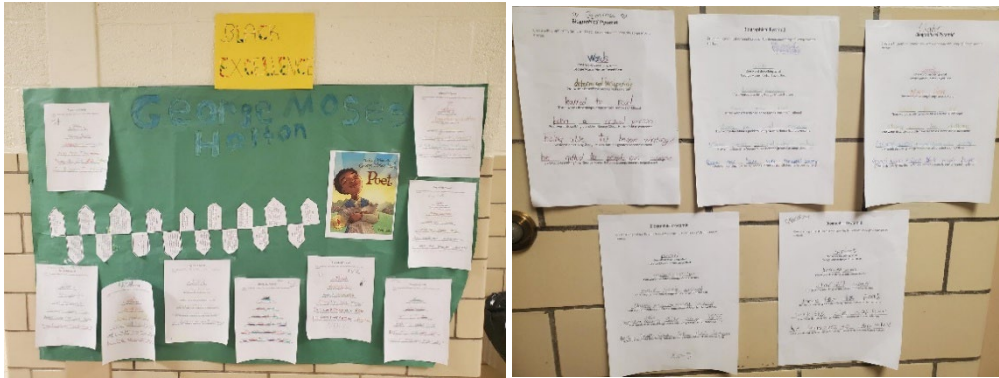


The RFES Black Excellence Program has been participating in book studies, practicing competition questions, and beginning our research projects.

So far, students have:

- read and discussed Poet: The Remarkable Story of George Moses Horton, and created a display with a timeline and poems for our hallway.





- practiced competition questions for the months of October and November.
- chosen a person to research and connect to the topic, *Taking a Stand: People, Ideas, and Events - How have the actions of a few benefited all?*

**Everyone is invited to the district-wide presentation of our research projects in February! Save the date - Saturday, Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> at Perry Hall High School**