



IN HAMPTON TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS, A CULTURE OF INCLUSION IS ON THE RISE — AND LED BY STUDENTS

Growing up in Dubai and Tanzania, Kulthoom Dinani attended international schools where a tapestry of kids from all over the globe found themselves in the same classroom. In schools like these, it's common for a new classmate to arrive on a Monday from Ecuador, or maybe Germany, and on Friday another classmate mentions that their family is moving to India.

When Kulthoom's family arrived in Hampton Township, a leafy suburb just north of Pittsburgh, she found a high school filled with challenging courses and interesting electives. Hampton High School and Middle School share a campus with the sprawling township park, where kids can shoot baskets after school or even fish in an idyllic pond tucked behind the baseball fields.

It's the kind of high school you might see in a movie — and it played exactly that role in "Abduction," the 2011 thriller starring Taylor Lautner.

Kulthoom found a lot to like in her new home. But one element was missing: She was one of very few teenagers among a student body of nearly 1,000 who had lived in multiple countries. In fact, nearly

every new classmate she met had been born in the Pittsburgh region — many in Hampton itself.

A generation ago at Hampton High, there were few ways for a student of color or one who'd emigrated from another country to remedy the sense that she was on her own. But today, Hampton's Multicultural Students Association is a place where Kulthoom and more than two dozen other students gather weekly to learn about one another.

They're hungry for knowledge about peoples and traditions and ideas from around the world, and they are slowly sharing this message with the rest of Hampton's school community.

For Hampton Superintendent Michael Loughead, the Multicultural Students Association and other student-run clubs — including the Black Student Union & Alliance, Empowerment Alliance, and Gay-Straight Alliance — are valuable resources.

Collaboration and empathy, which exist at the heart of these clubs' missions, are two of the six elements that Hampton chose to include in their "Portrait of a Talbot" — a summary of the strengths and habits that all students will ideally develop by graduation.

These ideas, Loughead says, are also echoed in the pillars of success described in the district's strategic plan. The plan's "Talbots Together" pillar is defined this way: "We celebrate our unique and collective experiences. We welcome learners, staff, and families from different backgrounds, experiences, and cultures. We treat all with dignity and respect by practicing empathy and using inclusive language and practices."

And the kicker, which sums it up: "Everyone belongs in our schools."

That's the goal of Hampton senior Tiffany Habib, current president of the Multicultural Students Association. She sees the club as a place with room for everyone, welcoming students focused on social justice and those simply seeking a place to be seen and heard while learning about each other.

CONNECTING WITHIN THE DISTRICT AND OUTSIDE IT

Hampton is part of the Western Pennsylvania Learning 2025 Alliance, a regional cohort of school districts working together — with support from The Grable Foundation — to create student-centered, equity-focused, future-driven schools.

Led by local superintendents and AASA, The School Superintendents Association, the Alliance convenes to help member districts innovate in ways that will prepare their students for success in a world with an increasingly global focus.

One benefit of working with AASA: Connections that get made between school districts.

When history and government teacher Claire Aloe stepped in as sponsor of the Multicultural Students Association in 2020, she got enthusiastic support from the administration. Loughead soon connected her with Chuck Herring, a veteran teacher and DEI specialist at South Fayette School District (another AASA member) who founded the SHOUT social justice clubs now operating at many schools in the region.

But while the adults at Hampton actively work at growing a welcoming school culture, they also make plenty of space for the high school's young adults to take the lead.

Aloe has been impressed by the students leading these clubs. She notes that the current head of the Black Student Union & Alliance, Josué Clark-Espinosa, is very much

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like his predecessors Jordyn Williams and Helena Campbell, who founded the group two years ago.

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That commitment is what will help these clubs continue to thrive. Like Tiffany, Josué is a senior this year. Each of these students are looking to mentor others to take over once they graduate.

They are also leading their groups to link up with students in other school districts. At this year’s Eradicate Hate Student Summit, Tiffany, Josué and their friends connected with like-minded students from nearby districts, learned more about efforts to combat intolerance in the Pittsburgh region, and were given \$1,000 in grant funding to begin their own efforts.

Among the work they’re already doing: visiting Hampton’s elementary schools to talk with younger students about tolerance and acceptance. “We’ve gone and taught kids about different cultures and languages and things like that,” Tiffany says, and there are plans to expand this project.

That ethos — ensuring that the spirit now growing so vigorously at the high school finds its way into all of Hampton’s school buildings — is one more step in planting the seeds today to grow tomorrow’s inclusion champions.

