Proposed is a national initiative which will build capacity for student dialogues on race and ethnicity, professional development for teachers and educators, and social justice and institutional change in schools and communities.

The initiative will:

- Engage students in intergroup dialogues on race and Ethnicity
- Prepare teachers with information and ideas about curriculum and pedagogy, including how to handle situations that arise in the classroom
- Enable superintendents and administrators to develop strategy for institutional change
- Share practices that strengthen academic achievement and educational excellence for all students
- Strengthen student voice and constituency support for educational justice.
- Evaluate initiatives and disseminate results for consideration in other districts.
- Create a national model for youth dialogues as a field of practice and subject of study.

Many metropolitan areas are becoming both more segregated and also more diverse. Although their cities are largely black and suburbs largely white, some small areas – notably suburban – are increasing in their residents of color.
“Segregation and diversity” results in institutional disparities and educational inequalities at the metropolitan level. Within suburbs themselves, especially the ones that are becoming more diverse, it results in academic achievement gaps, incidents in classrooms, and institutional adjustment issues in schools and communities.

Students are aware of segregation and want to communicate with others who are different from themselves. They know that there are inequalities among schools and that students are treated in unequal ways within them. They want intercultural skills to prepare for the world in which they will live, but because they attend segregated schools in segregated communities, they are limited.

There is need for initiatives that will increase student intergroup dialogues on race and ethnicity, provide teachers with curricular content and pedagogical skills, and enable administrators to build capacity for educational excellence for all students in a racially changing society.

The University of Michigan and Farmington Public Schools (FPS) collaborate in Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity in Metropolitan Detroit, which is among the nation’s most segregated. The program involves young people of Arab, Asian, European, Middle Eastern, and Latin American descent in intergroup dialogues that enable them to understand their own identities and those of others, discuss their similarities and differences, and develop their abilities to communicate and collaborate across boundaries that separate them.

They participate in metropolitan tours which enable them to observe segregation and diversity, campus retreats which enable them to learn together under the same roof, and community projects which enable them to challenge discrimination and create change.

Following the program, some participants step forward as change agents and policy leaders. For example, FPS students have created a new permanent course on intergroup dialogue, build support for diversity and diversity learning in the school board and city council, and persuaded the state board of education to approve a resolution calling for diversity learning for all students, professional development for all teachers, and student voice in educational policy decisions.

In addition, FPS and the University of Michigan have worked with Oakland County school superintendents to develop a series of 4-day professional development workshop on strengthening social justice for teachers and educators in all 28 school districts in the county.
The Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) is ideally positioned for initiatives like these. MSAN is a national network of multiracial, suburban-urban school districts with commitment to addressing achievement gaps in their districts. Most of the districts are located in resourceful suburbs whose innovations have influence nationwide.

Our hunch is that MSAN districts have students, teachers, and administrators who are searching for initiatives like ours, and would benefit from learning about promising practices that are available to them.

**ACTIVITIES**

**National Superintendents Group**

The initiative will be guided by a small group of school superintendents who will advise in its planning, implementation, and evaluation. Group members will be few in number, and will commit to involving and investing their own districts in launching an initiative.

**Local Groups**

Each superintendent group member will form a local district group for discussion of how to adapt an initiative of their own. Local groups will represent educators, students, and at least one college or university partner. It is important that local college or university partners come to the table for this purpose.

Each local group will host at least one half-day or whole-day workshop during the initial year to introduce the idea to students, teachers, and other educators. FPS and the University of Michigan will be available to help facilitate this workshop.

**MSAN Conference**

National superintendent group members will introduce the initiative to all MSAN members, in a session at one of the MSAN gatherings during the year.

**National Institute**

In consultation with the superintendents, the University of Michigan and Farmington Public Schools will organize a national institute for teachers and educators who wish to learn the concepts and techniques of youth dialogues on race and ethnicity, for the purpose of creating programs in their own schools or school districts.
Special emphasis at the institute will be placed upon how to:

1. Engage students in youth dialogues and program initiatives
2. Involve teachers and educators in professional development
3. Enable administrators to strengthen social justice and institutional changes at the district level

Program Development

At the end of a pilot period, the superintendents will evaluate the initiative, and discuss whether or how to take it to the next level. Meanwhile, participants will explore possibilities for external funding for continuation.

Leadership and Management

FPS and the University of Michigan will play a special role in initial leadership and management, with the expectation that this will be taken up by others over the long haul.