

# 7.16 Your School Has a Diversity Statement. Now What? with R...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Jasmine Bradshaw, Dr. Renata Williams

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**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 00:00  
You're listening to the First Name Basis Podcast, Season Seven, Episode 16, "Your school has a diversity statement. Now what?"

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 00:15  
Teaching our children to be inclusive and anti-racist starts with us within the sacred walls of our home. First Name Basis is designed to empower you with the confidence you need to be a leader in your family and a change maker in your community. Together we will wrestle with hard questions and use the answers to create the world we want, a world that reflects our values of inclusion, compassion, and courage. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw, and I am so excited to be on this journey with you.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 00:51  
Hello, First Name Basis fam. I am so glad you are here. I'm really excited to share this episode with you today because I feel like in the time after 2020, which is when a lot of you probably started listening to First Name Basis, there has been a lot of work done on diversity statements. I mean, people were bending over backwards to get someone to write a diversity statement for them. And now we really need to think about what that actually looks like playing out in the school. I've heard from some of you that you feel like your school had a good start when it comes to talking about anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in school with kiddos, but maybe it has kind of been put on the backburner, or maybe other things have taken priority, which is totally understandable. But let's talk today about some things that you can do to help your school, your children's school, whether you're a parent or your school if you're a teacher, get kind of back on track when it comes to really living up to what you wrote in that diversity statement.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 01:57

So I have invited Dr. Renata Williams here to teach us so much good stuff about what this can really look like in schools. Dr. Renata Williams is the inaugural Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at a school in Pennsylvania. And so she has a really big job. I mean, she is in charge of thinking about what it would really look like for that school and her community to be more equitable and to be more anti-racist. And because she's the inaugural person doing this job, she's the first one ever to have this job at the school. She is building a program from scratch. So I thought it would be really cool to be able to , what does it look like for other schools to be able to do that as well?

J Jasmine Bradshaw 02:43

One of the things that I loved â€” and you'll hear her explain this â€” but one of the things I really loved from what she was saying is that it's really important that we don't look for band aids, that we look to the root of the problem and try to address that. And one of the things that she recommended was training for teachers. I mean, it seems kind of simple, but it really is important. And I want to tell you, that ya girl, me, Hello! Raising my hand â€” I am one of those people who does training for teachers. So if that is something that you're interested in, whether you're a teacher or a parent, and you just want to recommend it to your school, your administration, please reach out to us at [hello@firstnamebasis.org](mailto:hello@firstnamebasis.org). I'll put that in the show notes, or the link on our website is just [firstnamebasis.org/speaking](http://firstnamebasis.org/speaking). There are so many cool things that we can do together in the realm of anti-racism at your school, but one of the biggest things that I'm super excited to offer now is training for teachers. So I can come in and do a handful of really in-depth professional development sessions with the teachers in your school, all about talking about race and racism with children. Y'all know that this is like something that I'm so passionate about, so I'm so excited to be able to share this new piece of First Name Basis with you.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 03:58

The other cool thing is that I can help you implement Ally Elementary into your school. So y'all know that Ally Elementary is the program that we developed for kiddos and their grownups and their teachers, and how to talk about race and racism. So how cool would it be, implementing Ally Elementary in your school and giving teachers the training they need to be able to facilitate these conversations with confidence? So that link again is [firstnamebasis.org/speaking](http://firstnamebasis.org/speaking) or just email us at [hello@firstnamebasis.org](mailto:hello@firstnamebasis.org), and we will get you hooked up.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 04:31

One other thing I wanted to mention is that Dr. Williams talked a lot about making sure that this conversation about anti-racism is age appropriate, which I totally agree with and I've already made an episode about. So if you're interested in that, make sure to check out the episode that's called "Age-Appropriate Anti-Racism." I will link that in the show notes. All right, y'all. Let's learn from Dr. Williams.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 04:56  
All right, Dr. Williams, welcome to First Name Basis.

D Dr. Renata Williams 04:59  
Thanks you so much. I'm so glad to be here.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 05:03  
Yes. Oh my gosh, tell us a little bit about yourself and the work that you do in schools.

D Dr. Renata Williams 05:09  
Oh, absolutely. So I am a mom, a wife, and I am, I graduated with my doctorate in 2020. That's a huge accomplishment for me.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 05:22  
Congratulations! That's amazing.

D Dr. Renata Williams 05:24  
Thank you! Super exciting. I come from actually a 16-year background in higher education, and recently made the transition switch over to the K-12 arena, which has been awesome so far. It's really been great. I really, I love working with students. And so no matter the age, I really enjoy thoroughly working with students. The work specifically that I'm doing right now, I'm serving as the Director of Diversity, Equity Inclusion at Mercersburg Academy in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. Entering independent boarding schools has been an interesting transition, but it's been phenomenal getting to work with colleagues and I really do call it a "get to." We had a school meeting at the start of the year, and I think I, I kind of described it to my colleagues and students as the work that I get to do every day as a real "get to" for me, as opposed to a "have to." That get to element is that I get to come to this beautiful campus and work with amazing colleagues and phenomenal students from around the globe and around the like, literally around the globe. So I just think it's a real pleasure and a joy. Although the work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and really probably I should say, justice and belonging is really challenging work at times, it is also rewarding as you get to witness growth. So that's what I do. That's a little bit about me.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 06:51  
I love that. Okay, so diving right into a really important topic, thinking about anti-racism in the classroom and what that looks like. I mean, we know that teachers just have so much content and curriculum that they're trying to get through during the year. I'm wondering what your

advice would be. Like, how can we help teachers feel like anti-racism can be sustainably integrated into their curriculum? So it's not just one more thing on their plate that's already so full?

**D** Dr. Renata Williams 07:20

Yeah, I, you know, what I think that really big piece of it is, I don't know that in education programs we're training our teachers to have these conversations. A lot of it is about either content mastery, or, like classroom management. But we're not teaching these things in our education programs. And so as well, historically, we haven't been teaching, how to have conversations around being an anti-racist institution or having like, age-appropriate discussions with your students. So whether you're talking to a five-year-old, or you're talking to 18-year-olds, like there's age appropriate ways to go about the conversation, and making sure that our educators have the tools and resources, and then also have the self awareness to know like, am I prepared to engage in this discussion in a fruitful way, so that I'm not doing more harm than good? I think those are really important things to think about as we passed our educators with embarking on some of these conversations, because they are critically important. But also, it's critically important that we have the skills and the know how to engage in these discussions so that they can have positive lasting impacts.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 08:37

Yes, I really like how you talked about starting with the source and like teacher education programs, because I think so often, we ask students to do something that adults aren't necessarily willing to do themselves. So starting with the adults in the room is such an important place.

**D** Dr. Renata Williams 08:53

Yeah. And so often our students like, especially now in the age of information, and our students are consistently empowered to be their authentic selves, you'll hear that far and wide. And even on our campus, right? We're always talking about our students showing up as their authentic selves, right? Our students have that down for a good portion of them. But our adults sometimes are catching up. It's not kind of that's not the space that they grew up in. That's not the space that they learned in. And so I think really providing the tools that are going to help our educators be successful. in that realm, it's really important. It's so important.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 09:36

Yeah, yeah. And kind of in that same vein, I really want to explore what it looks like to respond when something racist happens at school, because I think this is something that so many parents in our community are going through. I mean, I just heard from a mom recently that her student was explicitly excluded because the student the the white student, told her Black son he couldn't play with them because he had dark skin. And I'm just wondering, what should the adults in the situation do next? Like, what does a teacher do in response to something like this happening?

D

Dr. Renata Williams 10:12

I think the partnership and collaboration between parents and educators is so vital. Right. So we have to have a good understanding and a good relationship of where our parents are. And so, so when our kiddos are saying things like that, that doesn't come out of nowhere. Some of these things are learned behaviors, and how do our educators then address it in their classroom space. One of the things you'll hear again in doing the work of diversity, equity, inclusion is empathy, right? We're constantly trying to teach and convey empathy amongst our, our kiddos. And so whether they're 5, 10, 12, 18, we want to increase their empathic capabilities. And so helping them understand how that makes somebody feel when you like, put it in, in, in an age-appropriate way. Right? Yeah. So, "Does it feel good when Johnny doesn't ask you to play? Does it feel good when XYZ doesn't ask you to play? No, it doesn't. And so how do you think that made your friend feel? How do you think that made your classmate feel when you said that they couldn't play with you?" And just things like that. And so really building those skills early on, when they, when they're younger, just building that empathy so students can understand how other people are feeling in a particular way, even if they may never experience it themselves, helping students along in that way, as they get older, they'll have a broader horizon, then they will have a more empathic approach to how they're engaging with others. And I think, again, I'll circle back to that. Talking about these things and educator programs is so, so critical, because lots of times it's like a deer in headlights for our educators in the classroom space. They're like, "Oh, my goodness, what do I do? What do I do? What do I do?" But when if we've prepared them, and even if they don't use the tool until five, six years into their career, it's almost like riding a bike, it'll come back to you. And the more that you exercise these things in your classroom spaces, you'll flex those muscles, they'll get stronger, you'll be able more able to have those conversations, and giving people space and professional learning communities and things like that. So that, "Hey, this happened in my classroom, how would you have handled that? Oh, that idea?" Yeah, like just just creating those opportunities. So because some people, some educators are going to be well versed, and they're gonna say, "You know, I would have handled that with my eyes closed." But someone who doesn't, like who doesn't live with a marginalized identity might be like, "Whoa, that's brand new to me. I don't know." So I just think professional learning communities can be helpful. I think having more conversation in services and things like that, so that trainings, and don't shy away from trainings, having people that are experts come into the space and talk about these things, and giving people permission to not know and ask a question, and not be, I guess, I don't know the right word, but like, not be ostracized, for asking a question and not knowing.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 13:16

Yes, I really liked that you said that, too. Because I think it's important for, for people to have a space where they can kind of, I think a lot of people don't even know what's in their own head until they say it out loud. And they're like, "Whoa, I didn't realize I was holding on to that," right. So creating that space while protecting the marginalized folks. Like, we're not putting them you know, out to be abused or anything. But really, it is important that people can say this stuff out loud. So they could realize where their biases lie and then start to you know, uproot them.

D

Dr. Renata Williams 13:48

Dr. Renata Williams 13:40

That self awareness piece. Right? Like we think about, like, I know me, I know. But there's those things that are in the unconscious that just creep out and you're like, "Whoa, where did that come from?" Having that strong self awareness will really enable you to do your job well, and to do your job beyond just going to work every day and you know, really have passion for the areas and know yourself when you're going to be triggered by a particular thing. You can mitigate that before it gets to a particular point, you know what I mean? So I just think those kinds of inservice professional development opportunities are key if we're going to continue to make progress and continue to have these really relevant and deep and critical and substantive conversations.

Jasmine Bradshaw 14:36

Yeah, you are so right. And it was making me think, okay, so you probably noticed this, I feel like after 2020, like everybody and their mama has a diversity statement on their website. But it's not always reflected in like the way that the school is actually running. And so I'm wondering like, okay, the teachers have had the anti-racism training, they've written the inclusion statement. But then something happens at school, something racist happens. And then administration is not really ready to take action, like, what can a parent do in that situation?

Dr. Renata Williams 15:12

I would say, again, be in collaboration with your administration, like talk to them. Have parent groups that are saying, "Hey, we're really interested in partnering with you to make sure that not just a pocket of our students are protected and feel safe and feel empowered to be themselves and to be authentic, but all of our students, and we're recognizing there's an issue. How can we support you in resolving this issue, because our students are directly impacted." Right, having those real conversations. And I think it's important to hold folks accountable. Right? So you have all of this outlined on your website, but what does it all mean? Did you like, what is your why? What is your why? And did you do this to check a box? Did you do this because it was happening across the nation? Or do you really, are you really committed to these things that you're saying aloud? And I think, really, that's a tough conversation, right? And sometimes, again, you're stepping out on a limb as a parent to say, like, "No, I really want to be in dialogue with you." And it's not about debate. I want to be in dialogue with you to make sure that I feel good when my child is entering this building every day. I feel good that you're you have my kid's best interest in mind from the time they walk in the door to the time they walk out.

Jasmine Bradshaw 16:30

Yes. And I really like how before you mentioned, like bringing in, you know, an expert in the field. Like sometimes it helps to have someone come and lead a PD who's not necessarily as close to the situation, and can kind of be a little more neutral in in helping you move forward. So I think you're so right, that schools shouldn't be afraid to seek that outside help. And parents can be a big part of that, right, like requesting that, getting on the PTA, all those kinds of things.

D

Dr. Renata Williams 16:58

Yeah, absolutely. And so often, right, schools and districts will try and find someone homegrown, and task them on top of the other things that they're doing the classroom, but they're not.... Like, okay, so for example, it may be someone who identifies as Black, or who is Black, or someone who identifies as LGBTQ+, like, you must have an expertise in this area, because that's an identity that you hold. But that's not always true. There are people that say far and wide and loudly, "Look, I DO do this work daily, and I would love to partner with you, and I'd love to come in and move the needle for your organization." Tap into that, right? Use their expertise, and it will, because they're, they're putting it out there for you. And that way, sometimes that tough conversation that needs to be had and said without repercussions, that third party can come in and say that thing and then leave you with some tools to kind of work on that tough conversation and come back and check up. So that's really important.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 18:02

Oh my gosh, yeah, the point you made about making sure that we're not just like calling on our marginalized friends to do the work when there are experts, or people will like you and I raising our hand saying, "We'd love to help you." Well, I'm thinking too about like, okay, the schools are starting to have these, you know, tough conversations. And I've noticed that once we begin the journey with our students, they are so into it, which is so great. But at the same time, they'll kind of miss the mark a little. Like they're trying to identify racism, but they're not quite sure what it looks like. And so, for example, I used to be a second grade teacher, and I remember having conversations with my kiddos and then I had one who was like, "Oh my gosh, anytime we talk about race, that's racism." Like if you said, you know, "Martin Luther King was Black," he would be like, "Racism." I'm like, "No, no, like, that's an important piece of his identity." So I'm wondering like, how do we help students identify when something's actually racist versus, you know, maybe when it's not, without really shutting them down? And because they are these budding activists, that's what we're trying to help mold them into, right? So I'm wondering, like, how do we embrace them, and their enthusiasm about it while also keeping them on the right track?

D

Dr. Renata Williams 19:14

We can't shy away from these conversations. And we cannot have the conversations that... I'll pull on a piece that I said earlier that age-appropriate messaging or conversation so that, okay, we want to be in partnership with parents. This is what we're going to talk about today in the classroom. These are some of the questions that you can ask your kiddo when they come home today about the conversation that we had in the classroom so they see there's that through line, and that continued conversation, and then they can be in communication with you with questions that they have as well.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 19:44

Yes. And what I hear you saying is like the foundation of anti-racism really is community, right? Like communication between the parents, the administrators, and the teachers and the kiddos. I like all of us working together

Like all of us working together.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 19:58

Yeah, that's so good.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 20:00

Well, Dr. Williams, I'm so grateful that we had this conversation and I'm wondering, where can people connect with you? How can they get in touch?

D Dr. Renata Williams 20:09

So folks can connect with me, like I said, I work for Mercersburg Academy, and you can connect with me on my professional email, [williamsr@mercersburg.edu](mailto:williamsr@mercersburg.edu). But I'm always happy to answer questions. And I do have like, I've started collecting resources as I navigate this k-12 space. Really, I'm in a high school, actually, I'm navigating a nine through 12 space, but I collect resources for kind of K through 12. And so if there's something that I can help with, I'm always willing to kind of shoot that out and say, "Hey, here you go, why don't you take a look at this?" But if it's something that I don't have an answer for, or I don't have a response for, because I think there are a lot of times more responses than answers, I, I'm willing to help you investigate a little bit. And so because I think it grows my resource base as well, and I'd love to just be in conversation, in community, and really try to move the needle for our kids, because that's our why. By and large, we all went in, I hope we all went into education to make an impact on our kiddos, whether they're kiddos, young adults, what have you. That's what that's our why. That's why we went into education. And so if I can help you, please don't hesitate to tap me.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 21:20

Yes. Well, thank you so much for being here.

D Dr. Renata Williams 21:23

Of course, thank you so much for having me.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 21:26

Oh, my goodness. Okay. One of the things that really, really stuck out to me is that she talked about going to the source, right? She talked about the importance of really bringing the adults in on this conversation, whether it'd be the teachers, the administrators and the parents, everybody working together, collaborating and community. Oh, wow, that would be so powerful. Like, can you imagine that happening at your own school? If you're a teacher at your child's school, if you are a parent, I really want to help you do that. So please go to [firstnamebasis.org/speaking](http://firstnamebasis.org/speaking) or email us at [hello@firstnamebasis.org](mailto:hello@firstnamebasis.org). I can't wait to share more



about what it looks like to work with me in this capacity and what it looks like to really take the anti-racist education at your school to that next level, to really implement the things that you're learning and help students and teachers alike feel confident in these conversations and in taking action. Okay, y'all, I love you so much, and I'll talk to you next week.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 22:24

My friends, thank you for being here. I hope you can feel how much I believe in you, and how deeply I know that when we work together we can make real change in our communities. Any of the books or podcasts or articles that I referenced will be linked in the show notes. If you are looking for more detailed notes, be sure to head over to our Patreon community. On our Patreon site I provide all of the outlines that I use to make the episodes and everything is linked there so you don't have to take furious notes while you are listening. And don't forget to join us over on Instagram @firstname.basis. If you're interested in partnering with First Name Basis or doing some kind of collaboration, please email us at [hello@firstnamebasis.org](mailto:hello@firstnamebasis.org). All right, have a great week, my friends, and I will talk to you again soon.