

Peer Leaders Tackle Unconscious Bias

Forrestdale School Peer Leaders have engaged in year-long training, with their advisors Ms. Kate Sullivan and Ms. Nancy Pearson, related to unconscious bias. Through a partnership with The Central Jersey Consortium for Excellence and Equality at Monmouth University, students have studied the meaning of unconscious bias and how this may impact a school community.

Students attended their first training session in October to develop skills of awareness, knowledge, and skills in identifying unconscious bias in themselves and how that can impact their respective districts. Bringing this information back to Forrestdale, the students worked with



their advisors to develop leadership skills that will empower them to take action and promote advocacy, while promoting awareness of unconscious bias. The student leaders developed a presentation for all district staff, teaching skills for combating unconscious bias within their student body. One of the Peer Leaders, Charlie Patton, who presented the information to the district staff during a faculty meeting noted, “I find that unconscious bias is important to learn about as most people don’t believe it impacts them, but in reality it does.”

The goal is for these students to become social justice advocates at Forrestdale and begin to initiate change from a student-directed perspective. As a culminating activity, they will reconvene at Monmouth University in June with other participating districts to discuss what they implemented throughout the year, their struggles and challenges, positives and achievements, as well as the outcomes they experienced.

Through the district participation in this partnership, additional staff members have received training, including Administrators, counselors, secretaries, classroom teachers, and special education teachers. Ms. Sullivan, Peer Leader Advisor, said this about the experience, “It isn’t easy to recognize our biases, because as teachers we strive to be as fair as possible. This experience gave us a safe space to reflect on our biases and provided strategies to create a more equitable, just, and accepting environment.”