

F.I.R.E. NEWSLETTER

Webster, NY

Welcome!

Who We Are:

- Families Igniting Racial Equity (F.I.R.E.) is a group of parents and allies working together to address issues of racial equality through an intersectional lens in our schools.

What We Do:

- Our focus is always on developing and implementing action-oriented steps that create a positive impact on the outcomes and experiences of students.
- F.I.R.E. has become an asset to the general community by providing advocacy, resources, and tools to promote understanding around diversity, equity, and inclusion among the community at large.

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Welcome Dr. Robert Chalwell!

If you haven't already had the pleasure of meeting him, we'd like to introduce you to Dr. Robert Chalwell, Executive Director of Family & Student Services, and Inclusivity for the Webster Central School District (WCSD). He comes to this role with both the credentials and lived experiences that position him to speak to the nuances of Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) work in the WCSD. The FIRE team is excited that Dr. Chalwell is here, and we look forward to partnering with him.

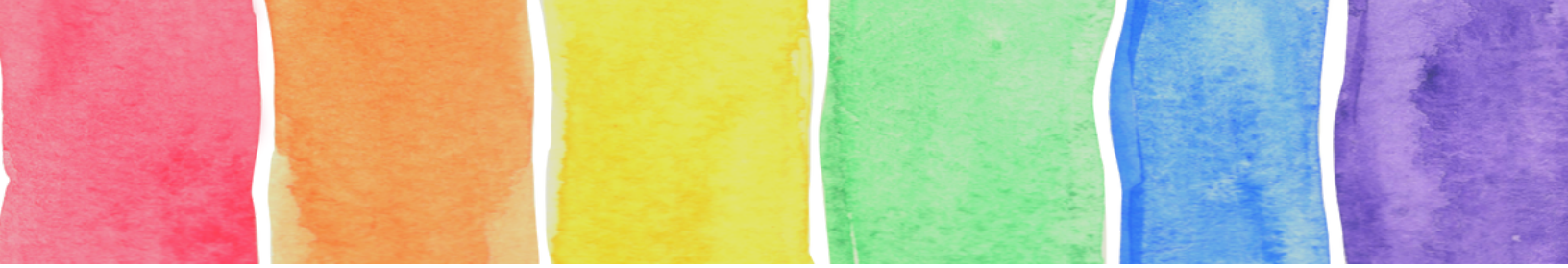
I, Mary Beth Covert, a FIRE steering committee member and WCSD parent, had the honor of sitting down with Dr. Chalwell for a couple of hours recently. The piece below comes from that meeting:

Dr. Chalwell is originally from the US Virgin Islands (St. Thomas). He, his mother, and (at the time) 2 younger siblings, moved to NYC (the Bronx) when he was 6 years old. As a child, Dr. Chalwell experienced an extended period of homelessness while living in New York City and he shared that this deepened his empathy with people across life circumstances. Dr. Chalwell noted, "No one life circumstance defines someone." He further credited his mother for modeling and championing literacy in her single-mother led home--allowing him to live into his potential, even through tough circumstances.



**"[The journey] to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization."
- Mahatma Gandhi**

[ADAPTED BY DR. CHALWELL
AS HIS GUIDING VISION]



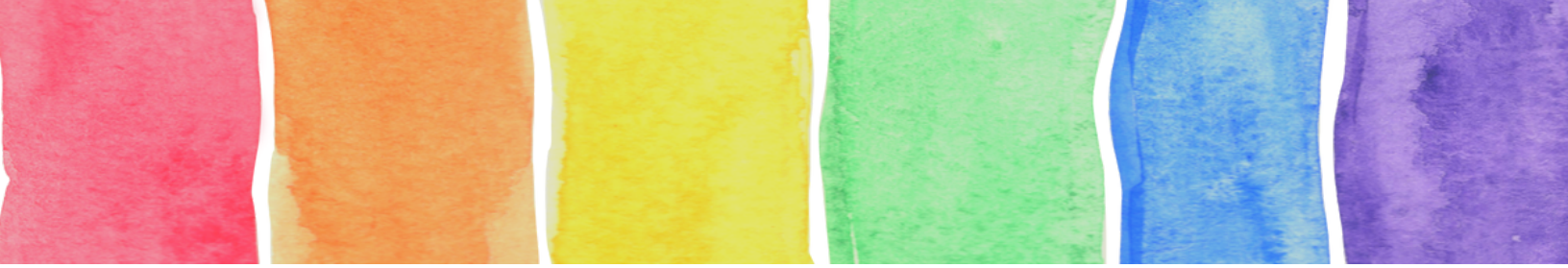
Welcome Dr. Robert Chalwell!

Dr. Chalwell began developing his leadership skills from a young age--often providing care for his three younger siblings. He added that this increased his awareness and skill for supporting the well-being of others. Attending 12 different schools by the time he got to college, Dr. Chalwell learned how to navigate and thrive in a variety in different settings and communities.

Dr. Chalwell comes from generations of musically inclined people--he grew up loving music and singing in church. This led to his acceptance into the High School of Performing Arts in NYC, now Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts. Dr. Chalwell's love of communications arts developed during this time and he honed his self-awareness and awareness of others, allowing him to connect with people -- where they are -- and helping to bring people together across their differences.

Since his years at LaGuardia, Dr. Chalwell earned a Bachelors Degree in Music from Boston University. He holds four Masters' degrees--one in Educational Leadership and Administration, one in Music, one in Global Affairs, and the other in Public Policy. He earned his PhD in Political Science at The University of Texas at Dallas. He has lived and worked across the United States, as well as abroad in Europe and in the Caribbean. Dr. Chalwell identifies the building of skill to "nurture resilient community" as a common thread across his many lived and professional experiences.

In the summer of 2022, Dr. Chalwell moved to Webster, NY to take on the role of Director of Family Engagement & Inclusivity for the WCSD. He parents his 18-year-old daughter as well as two nephews (ages 15 and 18). Outside of his work, Dr. Chalwell enjoys cooking and baking (aka, feeding people 😊), learning about and experiencing other cultures, and nurturing resilient community wherever and whenever he can.

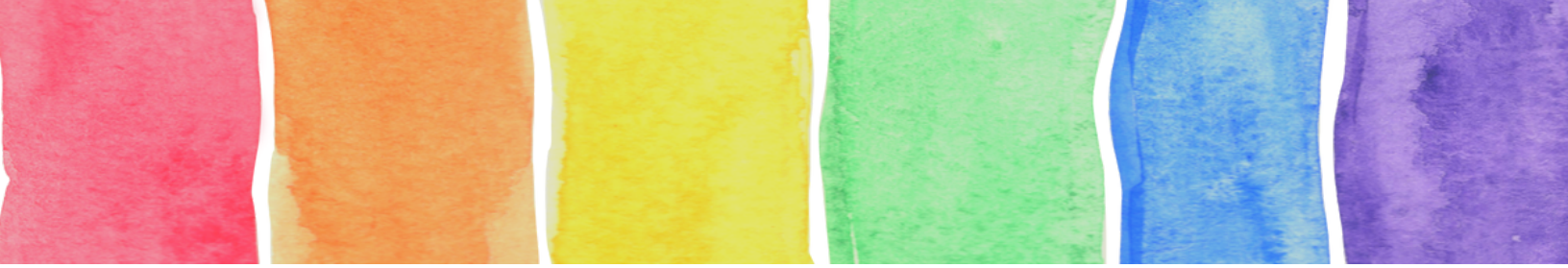


Welcome Dr. Robert Chalwell!

Since his arrival in Webster, Dr. Chalwell has hit the ground running with several DEI efforts. He has been partnering with staff, students, parents, and administrators--working on community building and addressing harm when it arises (e.g., the blackface incident at Thomas this past fall). Dr. Chalwell is steeped in Restorative Practices, a social science focused on improving and repairing relationships between people and communities.

When asked about his vision for his work, Dr. Chalwell compared his DEI work to a quixotic quest. Derived from the story of Don Quixote, a quixotic quest is thought to be a larger-than-life pursuit of ideals. The DEI work that Dr. Chalwell is passionate about asks all of us to stretch and grow--becoming more than the typical default human nature (i.e., in-group/out-group, bias, etc.). Growing and nurturing an equitable and resilient community is painstaking work that requires taking the long view. Although he is aware that true equity and other related societal goals may not be fully achievable in his lifetime, he sees their pursuit and each successive step toward them as a worthy calling, and a passion everyone should embrace.

When asked about what he sees as the biggest barrier to DEI work in the Webster area, Dr. Chalwell spoke about individual community member positionality and the positionality of the community, broadly. Webster is a community that has largely not had to be intentionally aware of its own positionality, or who we are individually and collectively within the system. Nor has it, in general, had to be aware of how the systems (laws/regulations/unspoken mores and norms) of this community have operated to privilege some and not others. Dr. Chalwell encourages us to learn about our own individual positionality within the Webster community system, as well as building understanding regarding the positionality of others as fellow members of our shared community.



Welcome Dr. Robert Chalwell!

During this part of the interview, we had an illuminating conversation about systems. Systems often work for those who are a part of the majority group—this leads many in the majority group to believe that those in other groups (with different positionality) can also learn the rules of the system and enjoy good outcomes. However, the good and predictable outcomes afforded to the majority group for learning and following the rules are often not reliably or consistently extended to those of different positionalities. Dr. Chalwell noted, “equity and inclusivity is not only about learning and successfully navigating the laws and other structures of the system. Outcomes are significantly determined by how one's positionality is viewed and engaged with (or not engaged with) by the majority within the system.”

Dr. Chalwell spoke about how much of the harm that transpires in the community is not intentional, but rooted in a lack of experience, practice, and intentional skill building, and the real challenge of fully seeing and respecting the humanity in others who appear or act differently to us. He spoke about how engaging across diverse walks of life, recognizing and acknowledging hurt and harm when it occurs, and even sharing multicultural spaces of joy or times of mourning is often very challenging in communities that are significantly socio-economically segregated. Dr. Chalwell sees part of his role as helping members of the majority group effectively engage in the work that they've expressed interest to be involved in—to be more inclusive, to recruit more diverse candidates, to make sure that all our students, across their diverse identities, have full access to the opportunities afforded by a Webster education.

WELCOME



Welcome Dr. Robert Chalwell!

When asked about how he will know that he has made progress toward his goals, Dr. Chalwell responded, “I will know that the work I’m doing is impactful: when investment in building and strengthening resilient community is prioritized; when there is consistent and reliable access to opportunity for all Webster students; and when the majority in this community is equipped, empowered, and willing to lead in this work. It is the community that must safeguard children’s learning and equity for all citizens of Webster. My success will be when this community is sufficiently and confidently equipped to safeguard the success and well-being of every Webster student, across their diverse identities.” Dr. Chalwell is clear that he wishes to build community ownership of DEI work so this vision will continue beyond his role. He added, “We need to learn how to responsively be, and stay, in productive community with each other, across our diverse identities. That is the primary goal of the work of nurturing resilient community.”

When asked about the next steps for us (the Webster community), Dr. Chalwell encouraged more active participation in the Equity and Restorative Practices skill-building work ongoing for students, teachers, and families. He noted that there is a history of unresolved hurt and harm, and there is a need for repairing the harm, and restoration on all sides. He also spoke about the need for partners who will “refuse to disengage,” particularly through tough times, and who will commit to always looking for the opportunity to repair harm, and restore and strengthen relationships where possible. The next Family Engagement Community Learning Event is February 15th from 6:30 - 8:00 pm. Please see the [WCSD Family Engagement & Inclusivity Webpage](#) for more information.

STAY TUNED - A NEW SUBSECTION OF THIS NEWSLETTER:

After two and a half hours of conversation, we knew that there was still much to be discussed. We will be checking in with Dr. Chalwell quarterly and bringing you updates on his efforts in this newsletter in a subsection called “Chats with Dr. Chalwell.” Please feel free to reach out with questions or topics you’d like him to respond to!

-Mary Beth Covert
marybcovert@gmail.com

February is Black History Month



"Black History Month is an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans and a time for recognizing their central role in U.S. history. Also known as African American History Month, the event grew out of "Negro History Week," the brainchild of noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans. Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as Black History Month. Other countries around the world, including Canada and the United Kingdom, also devote a month to celebrating Black history."

From: [History.com](https://www.history.com)

"We must never forget that Black History is American History. The achievements of African Americans have contributed to our nation's greatness."

- YVETTE CLARKE



February is Black History Month

Teacher Learning:

- Teacher's Guide: [African American History and Culture in the United States](#)
- National Archives: [African American History](#)

Online Events:

- [Smithsonian Online Events](#)
- [ASLAH: Black History Month Virtual Festival](#)

Classroom Activities:

- [28 Days of Black History Month](#)
- [Black History Month in the Music Room](#)
- [55 Black History Month Activities for Kids](#)
- [Joyful ABC Book](#)

Articles:

- [Prominent Figures Past and Present](#)
- [National Geographic Black History Month](#)

A celebration of black children and teen in literature:

- [The Brown Bookshelf: United in Story](#)

Videos:

- Brainpop - [African American History \(for older kids\)](#)
- BrainpopJr - [Ruby Bridges, George Washington Carver, Harriet Tubman, MLK, Rosa \(for younger kids\)](#)
- [Kid President:MLK](#)
- [Jackie Robinson](#)
- [Oscar Winning animated short film \(Hair Love\)](#)
- [PBS Black Culture Connection](#)

“The beauty of anti-racism is that you don’t have to pretend to be free of racism to be anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself. And it’s the only way forward.”

- IJOEMA OLUO



February is Black History Month

LOCAL EVENTS:

Check out the websites below for Black History Month events in our area!!

[Rochester Museum and Science Center](#) will be hosting events every weekend in February!

[University of Rochester](#)

[All Events In](#)

“Never be limited by other people’s limited imaginations.”

– DR. MAE JEMISON



The Court System is looking to partner with schools for Black History Month.

The 2023 Black History Month Theme is Black Resistance. The National Museum of African American History & Culture is sharing key stories of Black Resistance throughout February organized around five weekly focus areas that demonstrate how African Americans have practiced resistance from arriving in the Americas to today.

Week 1, Feb. 1-5: A Tradition of Activism

Week 2, Feb. 6-12: Foundations of Faith

Week 3, Feb. 13-19: The Value of Education

Week 4, Feb. 20-26: The Black Press

Week 5, Feb. 27-28: Leaning into Black Joy

We are looking for students creative expression of the above themes to submit to the court for an Art Exhibit of Black Resistance through the Eyes of Children! We will have a program on February 28 to display the art work and celebrate the children who participated.

All art work will need to be submitted by February 17, 2023 at 3:00 pm. We will schedule a meeting to discuss further on January 30th. Please contact Rashondra Martin if interested in participating: rashondramartin2@gmail.com



March is National Women's History & Gender Equality Month

"Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women."

- MAYA ANGELOU



RIGHTS





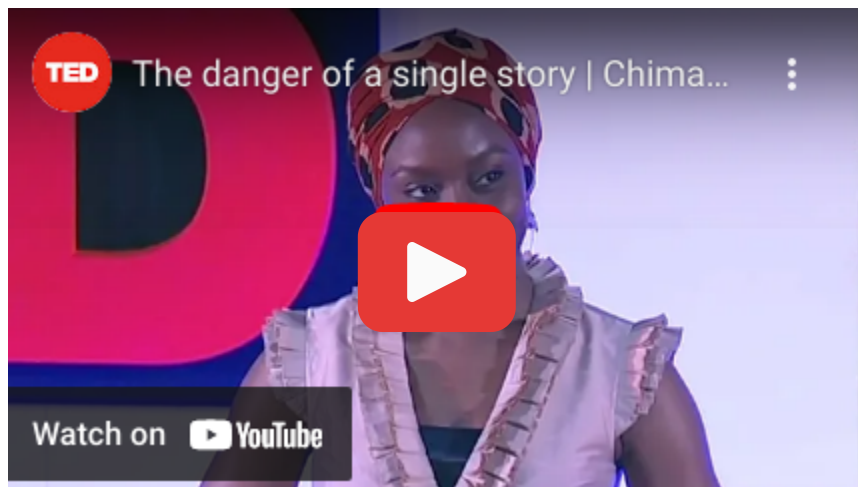
Resources For Good:

READING, LISTENING, ATTENDING, FOLLOWING, JOINING, AND WATCHING THAT SPURS US ON:



The Danger of A Single Story

A great TED talk that pairs well with Dr. Chalwell's vision



Follow Along & Join In

- White allies and accomplices check out the SURJ chapter of Rochester. SURJ is a national organization that brings hundreds of thousands of white people into fights for racial and economic justice: [Showing Up For Racial Justice \(SURJ\)](#)
- Parents raising Black children by birth, adoption, or across transracial lines check out the [Culturally Fluent Families Facebook Group](#).



Upcoming Events & Opportunities

2023 Hispanic Scholarship Application (now available in English & Spanish):

<https://www.iber.org/scholarship/>

The Stephen Feinberg Scholarship Program awards academically talented and highly motivated African-American or Black students pursuing an undergraduate degree in all discipline areas.

<https://cbcfinc.academicworks.com/opportunities/1076>

2/2/23@7:00-8:30: Being Black in the Burbs and Penfield AntiRacist Alliance will be hosting: [Speaking Up At School Board Meetings](#)

2/15/23@6:30-8:00: [WCSD Family Engagement Community Learning Event](#)

Local Black-Owned Business

Rochester Directory:

<https://www.bobrochester.com/directory.asp>

[Sign Dreamers](#): Beautiful yard sign rentals

[5 Mile Cafe](#): Serving a delicious breakfast or lunch in Penfield

Job Postings & Training Opportunities

[Webster Central School District Job Postings](#)

Local Food Pantries:

- St. Martin Lutheran Church at 813 Bay Road
- United Church of Christ at 570 Klem Rd
- Webster Baptist Church at 59 South Ave
- Phillips Village Apartments Stand at 100 Kreiger Rd

Bullying is NOT okay:

[Dignity for All Students Act \(DASA\)](#):

If your child experiences discrimination, harassment, or bullying, one avenue to address the issue is through filling out a DASA form. [Click here for the form.](#)

The F.I.R.E. Steering Committee also stands ready to consult about any of these issues.

Email us at:

fireofwebster@gmail.com



F.I.R.E Volunteer Opportunities

- Get involved in one of our Subcommittees: Recruitment & Hiring, African-American Heritage, Hispanic Heritage, Culturally Responsive Curriculum.
- Join our newsletter and social media teams. We need your creativity and excitement!
- Email fireofwebster@gmail.com with interest

Let's Keep in Touch

- If you haven't already, sign up to receive this monthly newsletter by emailing us at fireofwebster@gmail.com.

Drop Us A Line

- We'd love this newsletter to be a place where our community can share resources for good. Send your announcements, job opportunities, good book suggestions, etc. to marybcovert@gmail.com.

“In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute.”

- Thurgood Marshall



Gratefully,

The F.I.R.E. Steering Committee
Sonnette Bascoe, Laurie Soltman, Abby Terrana, Jen Birdsong-Ng,
Christy Roushey, Lauren West, Mary Beth Covert