



How-to Guide: Getting *The Universality of Italian Heritage Curriculum Infusion Model* in Your School System

As our children go back to school, it is more important than ever that parents have the resources they need to actively engage in their child's education. Roughly 56 million students attend elementary and secondary schools in America, and parents have the right to transparency and accountability in their children's education. Parents also have the right to be concerned about what their children are being taught and should be active participants in the curriculum taught in their children's schools.

Our Italian heritage is important to us, and it is an integral part of the history of our great nation. We feel that it is important to maintain our heritage by sharing the accomplishments and achievements of great Italian Americans with children of all ethnic backgrounds through our school systems.

The New Jersey Italian Heritage Commission (NJIHC) has created an equitable, diverse, inclusive, and Board-approved curriculum infusion model that uses heritage as a guide to better educate U.S. students in both public and private schools. It is titled: *The Universality of Italian Heritage*. Please view the [intro](#), [video breakdowns](#) and [lesson plans](#) on the NJIHC website.

We would like to ensure this curriculum infusion model is made available to school districts nationwide. [The National Columbus Education Foundation \(NCEF\)](#) and NJIHC, in coordination with [The Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations \(COPOMIAO\)](#), are working together to present this curriculum to the School Boards of Education across all 50 States. We need your help on a grassroots level to ensure that our voices are heard and that each local school board is made aware that this curriculum is available and that we would like to see it included in our schools.

Public schools and their school boards are accountable to the taxpayer. With the appropriate tools, parents can become involved and ensure that their child is receiving the best possible education. ***There has never been a more critical time to advocate for your child and the preservation of our heritage.***

HERE IS HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED:

1. ENGAGING WITH LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS

What Are Local School Boards?

—School board members wield a great deal of power as elected officials. Local school district boards do not report to the state board of education. They only are accountable to the voters in their local jurisdiction — that means **YOU!**

—Local school boards establish and maintain a basic organizational structure for local schools.

—There are roughly 14,000 school boards across the country and about 100,000 school board members. Moreover, 95 percent of the school board members are elected to their positions. They represent the largest group of elected officials in the country.

—School board members set a district's priorities for spending, resolve legal and disciplinary issues, acquire land, and even initiate eminent domain proceedings. They ensure curricula meet federal and state mandates for public schools, appoint superintendents, adopt budgets, and help to maintain educational excellence.

What Happens at a School Board Meeting?

—Every board meeting is different but listed below are the common components occurring in most meetings. Please review your school board’s policies to understand the exact procedures of your school board’s meetings.

—A local school board’s parliamentary procedure is a matter of local policy. Usually, the superintendent or school board president gives a general update and announcements before any new business.

—The most effective way to get an item that requires board action onto the agenda is to contact the board president or superintendent before the meeting. Items can be added to the agenda at the beginning of a meeting, but it is more difficult because there would need to be a motion made by a board member to amend the agenda to add an item and must be affirmed by a vote of the board members. To help board members be prepared for meetings, it is better to have a new agenda item added before the actual meeting.

—Board members follow a pre-approved agenda. ***There are two opportunities for public input at board meetings:***

- During the time for public comment on agenda items at the beginning of the meeting.
- During the time for public comment at the end of the meeting.

—Board members listen to public input and take it into account during discussion and deliberation. However, Board members have no direct interaction with the public during a regular school board meeting.

—The board president acknowledges and thanks members of the public for their input as appropriate. Once Board members make their comments, they will move to discussion on an agenda item. At this point, the audience (you) and staff no longer participate.

How Can Parents Get Involved?

—Parents should search when and where the school board meetings take place. Usually, they take place at least once a month. Information on school board meetings is on the school district website.

—***School board meetings are public meetings and public notice of the meetings must be provided at least 5 days before the meeting date and time.*** Attending local school board meetings helps parents stay vigilant and keeps them aware of what is being taught in the community.

—Parents can keep track of board activities by ***reading the meeting minutes (notes of what happened)***, which must be posted on the school district website.

—Many school boards have committees and workgroups that give the school board advice or make recommendations about issues. For example, school boards are typically required by law to involve parents, teachers, students, and community members in developing and reviewing school policies. School board directors are often eager to hear from parents who volunteer their time. ***Contact your school board members and offer to help with any workgroup.***

—Parents can set up a parent group on social media for families in the community so that parents can share information and PTA activities for more involvement opportunities.

—Parents can contact school board members directly. Usually, contact information for individual board members can be found on the school district’s website under “board members.” If it is not posted online, contact the number on the website and request this information.

—Parents have the right to ask school board members their position on various issues.

2. MEETING WITH LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Meeting with individual school board members is a great way to fully understand their views on issues and obtain more information on given topics. School board member information is typically posted on the website (if you cannot find

their email or phone number, you can call the district line), and many members will take time to meet with you or a small group of parents.

Strategies for Speaking with School Board Members:

—When setting up the meeting, be specific about what you are interested in discussing. ***Be clear if you are planning to discuss general topics or a particular policy.***

—***Consider bringing other parents with you for the meeting with a board member.*** Keep the meeting small and let the board member know who you will be bringing ahead of time.

—Parents and community members have a lot of expertise to bring to school board members. Be sure to connect with them by sharing a personal story of how the policy you are discussing is affecting your child or your family. Be sure to share your expertise on the issue as well as ***suggested solutions to the issue.*** Your expertise does not need to be your professional or educational background. As a parent your expertise may be rooted in your experience as a mother or father, or even a concerned community member.

—***Follow up with the entire school board after your member meeting.*** It is always helpful to present your concerns or points officially to the entire school board through a letter or one-page summary on the topic. These notes will then become part of the public record and are included in the board minutes. You can do this by sending an email to all members of the school board or the board secretary.

Letters, emails, and phone calls can also be a good way to communicate with them.

3. REQUESTING ACCESS TO CURRICULUM PLANS AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

As a parent, you have the right to request access to the curriculum and instructional materials. Parents often receive materials directly from the school through your child’s packet of information sent home throughout the year. As a parent, you also have the right to speak with your child’s teacher and principal. In addition, parents can request to see the materials used in their child’s classroom.

The school district website also provides additional details about meetings, trainings, and programs on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through **state freedom of information or sunshine laws**, parents can request to see public records more formally. All trainings, programs, and curricula related to CRT or equity-based curricula can be requested. Once you receive the documents, you can share what you observed with parents and post them on social media.

Much like reaching out to the local school board members, parents can ***directly contact the state school board members.*** You can find contact information for your state board of education members on the [United States Department of Education website](#). Ask how you can be involved in the process of developing academic standards. Depending on your state statutes, many state boards of education must have a parent serve on the board.

4. MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD

What Is High-Quality Curriculum?

A high-quality curriculum is built on *high expectations, aligned with robust scholarly standards, is academically rigorous, and is designed to meet all learners’ needs.* Research confirms that implementing a “high quality” curriculum leads to improved learning outcomes for students. Impact on student learning over several years is one of the best determinants of a curriculum’s quality.

As a parent, you must, and should, participate in your child’s education. We know that your Italian heritage is important to you and must be preserved. There is no better way to do that than to join us in ensuring that this curriculum is made available to school districts throughout our country.

If you would like further information on how you can participate, please contact us at the **National Columbus Education Foundation** (www.knowcolumbus.org) to find out more. Deputy Executive Directors **Frank Ciatto** and **Brown James** will be happy to provide you with further information. You may reach us via email at:

Frank Ciatto: fciatto@knowcolumbus.org

Brown James: bjames@knowcolumbus.org

The National Columbus Education Foundation (NCEF) and the New Jersey Italian Heritage Commission (NJIHC) are both proud members of The Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations (COPIAO). Cav. Gilda Rorro Baldassari, Ed.D. and Robert DiBiase lead the NJIHC Curriculum Development Committee, and they spearheaded the development of [***The Universality of Italian Heritage Curriculum Infusion Model***](#).

Thank you for helping us preserve our heritage!