



MILTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Statement of Superintendent Mary C. Gormley

Milton Public Schools Anti-Racism Agenda

Superintendent's Report
Milton School Committee Meeting
July 8, 2020

At its very best, the Milton Public Schools is a community of *lifelong learners* – students and adults alike – who always strive to do better, to grow and improve, as individuals and as an institution.

Over the past four months, our community has been transformed in ways that none of us could have imagined. In the midst of the Covid-19 crisis, our school buildings were closed, turning our kitchens and living rooms into virtual classrooms. Many of us adapted to working from home. We learned to social distance and wear face coverings. We endured extended isolation from our neighbors, families, and friends. Some in our community have faced even greater hardships -- losing their jobs, or losing loved ones to the disease.

Needless to say, none of this has been easy. And it is far from over. We now face the enormous challenge of devising plans to re-open schools – to allow as many students as possible to return to in-school learning, while ensuring the health and safety of all children and adults. It is a complex, daunting task, but we will make it work together. And we will be a stronger Milton Public Schools as a result.

But not all of the lessons learned over the past few months are specific to Covid-19. This spring, communities across the country began to confront, like never before, the devastating effects of institutional racism in the United States. Spurred by the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor,

Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and far too many others, the Black Lives Matter movement has galvanized legions of Americans to stand up, speak out, and demand change.

Conversations about racism, bias, oppression, violence, and injustice are difficult, to say the least. But they are critical conversations to have if we are truly committed to moving forward and building a stronger, more inclusive, equitable nation. These difficult conversations are particularly vital in schools. From pre-school through high school, our educators must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, support, and academic freedom to facilitate classroom lessons and discussions about the complex issues of race and racism. Every student in the Milton Public Schools should engage in thoughtful conversations, meaningful study, and critical thinking about race and racism – both historically and in today’s context.

Beginning last month, a series of events here in Milton reminded us all that we have much work to do on issues of race and racism. As your Superintendent, I accept full responsibility for mistakes that were made for the unfair treatment of a valued educator. I have apologized publicly and privately for an error in judgement that I deeply wish I could undo. I am grateful to the School Committee for their willingness to join me in saying that what occurred was wrong, should never happen again, and does not reflect who we aspire to be as a school system.

Our responsibility now is to forge a path forward. As a community of lifelong learners, we must be not only *willing* but in fact *eager* to improve. Our students – ALL of our students – deserve nothing less.

I’m proud of the work we have undertaken together over many years to foster a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive school system. We know that families of many different identities and backgrounds often choose to live in Milton precisely because our schools serve a diverse student population and work hard to create safe, welcoming learning environments for ALL families and staff. We have prioritized the hiring of teachers and leaders of color, to ensure that our faculty more closely reflect the students we serve. In fact, one of the six central pillars of our Strategic Plan is focused on creating a more equitable and inclusive school system. That work has centered around eradicating bias in many forms – including racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, and more.

But we also know that these efforts are only the beginning of our journey. Members of our community still experience racism, discrimination, harassment, and injustice – both in and out of school, in everyday interactions and sometimes in larger, more systemic forms of oppression. Tonight, we heard

powerful testimony from members of our community about their experiences of racism and other bias. I personally want to thank each of you for your courage and your candor in sharing these painful, personal stories. Our work must always be *grounded in* and *elevated* by the authentic voices of our students, families, and staff. As I have shared previously, I plan to schedule a series of community listening sessions to hear additional voices describing a range of experiences in our schools.

In addition to these individual experiences, we also recognize the broader, more systemic challenges we face. We know that access and achievement gaps persist in our schools, and that students of color – particularly Black and Brown boys and young men – experience disproportionately higher rates of special education qualification, disciplinary action, and other inequities. These disparities are unacceptable, and until they are remedied, we as a school district will not achieve excellence.

Over the past month in particular, the call for significant change has been sounded most loudly and clearly by the Milton Anti-Racist Coalition, or MARC. I am deeply grateful to this group as well as Citizens for a Diverse Milton, both consisting of parents and community members who have come forward not only to highlight what is broken, but also to offer constructive ideas for reform. MARC has challenged us – *all* of us – to proceed with a greater sense of urgency, determination, and accountability in becoming a [quote] “excellence-with-equity, anti-racist educational system ... one that ‘raises the bar and closes gaps.’” And they have rightly pointed out that the school district itself – starting with the School Committee and the Superintendent – must not merely *support* that work, but *lead it*.

As your Superintendent, I have always been committed to ensuring equity and access, and I have always acted on the principle that *every* student in the Milton Public Schools deserves the very best educational experience – one that enables them to reach their full academic and personal potential. But I also hear the voices of those who say that has not always been their experience. And I recognize that as a white person, I operate from a position of privilege. A critical component of this journey is for each of us to recognize and dismantle our own bias and blind spots, learned in some cases over many decades. Inspired, educated, and challenged by neighbors and colleagues, I commit with more determination than ever to lead an exciting new chapter for the Milton Public Schools, in relentless pursuit of becoming an anti-racism school system.

To that end, tonight I am pleased to report on some of the immediate steps we have already taken and the work we will embark upon moving forward. We are guided in these efforts by the

“MPS Reform Platform” that MARC submitted to me and the School Committee. This document proposes a variety of measures to promote an anti-racism school district in policy, practice, pedagogy, programs, curriculum, resources, and more.

The MARC platform serves as a powerful starting point for the work ahead. The document calls for a multi-phase process that begins with “Phase 1 – Learning” – to take a comprehensive look at all aspects of the district’s work through an equity lens. And that is exactly where we have begun. **This week we will be seeking feedback from the community on a Request for Proposals to select an external consultant that will conduct an “Equity Audit” and serve as our lead partner in this work.** We are seeking an organization with deep experience in anti-racism work to help us assess where we are and chart a course for reform moving forward.

We also share MARC’s belief that this work must be guided by a plan – not one that sits on a shelf, but an *actionable* plan with specific targets, milestones, and metrics for measuring progress. It is critical that this roadmap is aligned with the district’s overarching five-year Strategic Plan. As I mentioned earlier, our Strategic Plan already includes a primary goal related to Equity and Cultural Competency. But I believe we must be more intentional in naming and distinguishing this work. Therefore, tonight I am announcing the following:

1. We will establish the **Milton Public Schools Anti-Racism Action Team**. This group will include members of the existing Strategic Plan Subcommittee on Equity and Cultural Competency, as well as additional members, including parents and community members. We are hopeful that some representatives of MARC will participate in this Action Team. I will co-chair this Action Team with a parent or community member.
2. The Anti-Racism Action Team will be charged with developing an **Anti-Racism Action Plan**. It will build on the initial recommendations presented in the MARC platform and will include short-term and longer-term goals and priorities, as well as specific, actionable steps, with clear timelines and metrics for accountability. The Action Team will submit a draft of its plan to the community and the School Committee for feedback, revision, and approval. The Action Team will then lead implementation, oversight, and monitoring of the Action Plan itself.

In collaboration with the School Committee, we will finalize details about the Action Team and the Action Plan in the coming weeks. Of course, there will be challenges associated with launching these

efforts in the midst of much uncertainty about what the new school year will look like, but we are proceeding with a clear and compelling sense of urgency. We will continue to keep the community informed about this work in a variety of ways, including a new web page devoted to our anti-racism work, linked from the home page of the district website.

In closing, I would like to share a personal reflection about what this experience has meant to me, as a lifelong resident of Milton, as a graduate of Milton Public Schools, as an educator, and as your Superintendent. During my time as a proud member of the Milton community, I've seen this district evolve and improve, and I'm honored to have played a part in that trajectory of progress. Like any learning organization, the school system changed with the times, and with changes in our society and our town. Whether incorporating technology, building new schools, adopting new teaching practices, or responding to national and international events, we have demonstrated time and time again our willingness and ability to improve. We are a strong school system because we have always refused to settle for the *status quo*.

I, for one, embrace the opportunity to dig even deeper, to discover what is possible, as we strive to become an anti-racism school district. I still have a lot to learn – a challenge I accept with great enthusiasm and passion. Above all, I look forward to working with the School Committee, the Milton Educators Association, staff, parents, guardians, students, and community partners, to lead the Milton Public Schools to even greater heights. I have the utmost confidence that we *will* become all that we aspire to be.

The Milton Public School system does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, gender identity, transgender status, gender transitioning, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, pregnancy/parenting status, marital status, sexual orientation, homelessness, or military status, in any of its programs, activities or operations. These include, but are not limited to, admissions, equal access to programs and activities, hiring and firing of staff, provision of and access to programs and services, as well as selection of volunteers, vendors and employers recruiting at the Milton Public Schools. We are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our staff, students, volunteers, subcontractors, and vendors. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies: Dr. Karen L. Spaulding, Asst. Superintendent for Curriculum & Human Resources, 617-696-4812.