

Reflections on MBUSD's Efforts to Address Equity, Diversity, Social Justice, and Inclusion
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I have a framed photograph of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in my office. On it is one of his many inspiring quotes, "The time is always right to do what is right." While MBUSD has always strived to address all forms of discrimination and hate, the time has never been more right to address these issues with even more determination and resolve.

I am writing to discuss MBUSD's efforts to address equity, diversity, social justice, and inclusion (EDSJI). Last summer, our Board of Trustees adopted a goal to address EDSJI in our district. The goal makes so much sense. It builds on our Board's longstanding initiative of developing a "Culture of Care" in MBUSD. It reflects communications we received from many Mira Costa alumni and employees who asked us to address issues of discrimination or bias they had experienced or witnessed. And, of course, it reflects national events that brought about local and national protests.

So, what have we done so far? Many of you remember that in 2017 we adopted the [Stand Up Commitment](#), and that those maxims are posted in every district classroom. In the fall, we created the EDSJI Committee, with the following charges:

- Help facilitate discussions that explore and address bias, discrimination, micro-aggressions and stereotypes perpetuated in our district that cause systematic oppression and impact teaching practices.
- Identify ongoing professional development opportunities for all district staff, including anti-bias and anti-discrimination training.
- Discuss curriculum modifications that encourage inclusion, allow all students to feel represented, and find their voices.
- Examine and suggest revisions to reporting processes to ensure that they are fair, accessible, equitable, clear, and that they address systemic barriers.
- Assess existing disciplinary and restorative justice practices as well as potential changes to such practices to effectively address acts of racism, discrimination, and harassment in the district.

Since then, our committee has met and discussed elements related to the charges. Our first task is to explore concerns that some of our alumni and staff raised through a self-study. We hired an independent firm, The Center for Leadership, Equity, and Research (CLEAR), to help us with this work. We also hired UCLA Center X to help us with the eventual task of providing training for our staff to develop skills and a thoughtful approach to facilitating dialogue that will allow all voices and perspectives to be heard and respected. Other than our efforts over the last few years to make our reading lists more reflective of the diverse world we live in, we have not begun developing curricular materials for our students, making curricular changes, initiating new policies or practices, or otherwise changing our systems, as we believe it is critical to first understand where we are as an organization before determining what changes need to be made.

Over the past month, I have received many inquiries from people about the work we are doing. I would like to respond to some of the questions and statements we have received.

MBUSD leaders are criticizing Manhattan Beach and calling us a racist community.

Not true. Neither I nor my fellow MBUSD leaders would ever label our community as a racist community. We are all proud to work in Manhattan Beach. But just as it is unfair to give us that label, it is also untrue to say that we are a community where racism and other forms of discrimination have ceased to exist. I have listened to many stories of discriminatory experiences that MBUSD employees, students, and parents have shared with me. It hurts to hear these stories. And this is far bigger than our community. It's a national issue. In today's Wall Street Journal there is one article about ways of addressing racism in our country, and another about the rise in anti-Semitism. These are real issues that our nation is currently grappling with.

We are not bringing these examples to the forefront as a way of criticizing our community. In fact, it's just the opposite. We are saying that we are striving to be a place where we can work together to eliminate racism and all forms of discriminatory behavior. We are proclaiming, in a way loud enough for all to hear, that we want every student and family to know they are welcome, and that they are included in our community. Sometimes, if you don't announce such a vision clearly and loudly, the very people who need to hear it are the ones who don't.

MBUSD is prioritizing equal outcomes (equity) ahead of excellence and seeks to divide us on the basis of race.

Not true. Not one bit. We seek to maintain excellence while providing greater equity. We have never discussed ideology that prioritizes equal outcomes over excellence. I will point to our philosophy with Advanced Placement in high school. We have sought to increase access to our AP courses. In the past 10 years, we have dramatically increased the number of students taking AP tests, and the percentage of students passing has actually INCREASED. This is what we seek to do. We want more and more students to experience success and to achieve excellence in MBUSD. The accusation that we are seeking to divide our community on the basis of race is inflammatory and untrue. MBUSD seeks to bring greater understanding, increased communication, deeper empathy for each other, and to work together to help all of our students achieve at high levels.

The EDSJI Committee was formed in response to disturbing trends in our local schools that seek to weave Critical Race Theory across all aspects of education. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a divisive ideology that teaches people that America was founded on racist principles, categorizes people as oppressors or oppressed and denigrates the family unit, with an end goal of destroying our constitution's guiding principles.

I have received several emails, some of them from new organizations in town, about Critical Race Theory. And yet, there is no talk of Critical Race Theory in anything we have done. I have not attended a single meeting where Critical Race Theory was discussed. Most of you know I'm a former US History teacher. I do not have a PhD in history, but I have a love for our country and our Constitution, and a passion for helping students to understand and appreciate what we stand for as a nation. With that in mind, here are a few thoughts:

- While it is too strong to say that America was founded on racist principals, it's also historically inaccurate to say that racism was absent from our founding. For example, the "3/5 Compromise" is a part of our Constitution, stating that those persons not free (African slaves) were to be counted as 3/5 as a person when it came to counting members of the population to determine how many representatives each state would have in Congress. In one fell swoop, the

Constitution both legitimized slavery and gave states with slavery an advantage in the House of Representatives.

- From when the first slaves arrived in 1619, it took almost 250 years until Black men had the right to vote (and 300 years for Black women to receive the same right). And it took another 100 years until our government, in response to nation-wide protests, passed civil rights laws that actually made that right much more of a reality for Black men and women.
- And, like it or not, America is a nation that has expanded dramatically since 1776, by purchase and by conquest. Manifest Destiny and the Age of Imperialism are two common labels for that expansion.

Finally, to say that MBUSD would be associated with anything that has the goal of destroying the family unit or the US Constitution is sadly mistaken. Those are broad accusations with no absolutely no basis in fact.

I believe that all of us want MBUSD to be a community where each student, employee, family, and visitor, regardless of their ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, citizenship status, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, language, religion, medical history, ability, economic status, family model, sexual orientation, marital status, parental status, or age, is welcome and safe. I know that it is our responsibility as a public education institution to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to learn, and that foundational to that opportunity is ensuring that all students know that we see every one of them as integral to our school community. This is not simple work, and this is not quick work. And if we can do this successfully over the years, then more and more students will be able to succeed in MBUSD schools and be prepared for a successful future in a world that hopefully, with their leadership, will be more accepting of all of us.