

WAYLAND · PUBLIC · SCHOOLS

WAYLAND, MASSACHUSETTS

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February 12, 2019

Dear Parents, Guardians and Staff:

In this letter, I would like to discuss our District's ongoing work to ensure that students of all races and ethnicities feel welcomed, nurtured and challenged.

Over the last few years, the Wayland Public Schools have become more diverse. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's 2018 demographic report, Wayland has 16% students of Asian descent, 5% African-American students, 4% Hispanic students, 6% multi-race/Native Hawaii/Pacific Islander and 69% white. Wayland Public Schools has also encouraged diversity by passionately supporting the METCO program since 1968. Through this program, Wayland currently enrolls 137 students who are residents of Boston.

In order to harness these diverse perspectives in the classroom, our students, first of all, study our country's history through the prism of race and ethnicity. I will briefly touch on just a few examples of the work our teachers do from kindergarten through twelfth grade. In third grade, our students combine field trips to Plymouth Plantations with a careful study of European-Americans' contact with Native American peoples. In fourth grade, students study the impact of immigrants on the United States. Wayland Middle School Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator, Jake Montwieler, explains one focus of the eighth grade curriculum by stating the following: students "compare the history of school integration in Little Rock, Arkansas with the history of Boston's desegregation. This unit challenges students to identify similarities between structural racism in the North and in the South." At the High School, Department Head Kevin Delaney explains that "several US history classes recently studied the origins, objectives and strategies of the Black Lives Matter movement and [determined] the extent to which it's something new, or more of a continuation of prior movements for civil rights." Ultimately, in Wayland we want our students to have the knowledge and skills to engage deeply as citizens and respond to the question that historian Jill Lepore poses in her 2018 history *These Truths*: "Is there any arrangement of government ... by which it's possible for a people to rule themselves, justly and fairly, and as equals, through the exercise of judgement and care?"

Because we know, in addition, that all of our children at some point experience racially charged incidents at school, we need to make our classrooms safe spaces for them to surface their emotions and their perspectives. Conversations about race take place in milieus like Open Circle at the elementary schools, TAG at the Middle School and Advisory at the High School. High School staff have also supported several structured student-led conversations when issues have arisen. In addition, we have several district-wide cultural celebrations that include The World's Fair, Chinese Lunar New Year, and the Martin Luther King Dinner that heighten our appreciation for our diversity.

Even with all of this work, we repeatedly hear from students and parents that our students of color at times feel less welcomed and their perspective is less included in the everyday lives of our schools. We also see evidence that there might be an opportunity gap in our schools: for example, a significantly smaller percentage of our African-American and Latino students are currently enrolled in at least one honors class than our white and Asian students.

After much conversation, the Administrative Council (our Principals, Assistant Principals, and Central office administrators) has identified four specific areas for the District to address to deepen its support of diversity and equity. First, the Central

Office, in partnership with building principals, will significantly intensify its efforts to recruit teachers of Asian, African-American, Latino, and Native American background. Second, we will reinvigorate the professional development we offer both our newer and our veteran teachers to empower them to lead discussions about race and to respond to incidents that arise inside and outside the classroom. Third, I have asked the District's current Leadership for Equity group to work with our teachers to identify and develop action steps to address one particular issue that they find is a particularly significant obstacle for our students of color in achieving their academic potential.

Finally, I would like to form a Superintendent's group of interested staff and parents, representing a variety of racial and ethnic groups, to study our students' daily experiences related to race and ethnicity. Our goal would be to build on current efforts and to develop new community-wide solutions that ensure that Wayland welcomes, notices, and nurtures all of our students so that they are prepared to succeed in the Wayland Public Schools and beyond. If you are interested in participating in this group, please contact me at arthur_unobskey@wayland.k12.ma.us.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Arthur Unobskey".

Arthur Unobskey, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools