

LOWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Henry J. Mroz Central Administration Offices
155 Merrimack Street
Lowell, MA 01852

June 19, 2020

Dear Lowell Public Schools Community,

The district is in receipt of an open letter which articulates the impact of Lowell's public policies on communities of color, calling out the systemic racism that families across our city have experienced as a public health crisis. The steps outlined in the letter provide an important call to action and a meaningful launching pad for the collective work that's needed to combat racism in all forms. Our families and community members are important drivers of change, and we recognize the importance of the letter as part of the improvement process for our public institutions.

One of the five core beliefs for our district is that *"every adult in the system is accountable for the success of all students; putting every child on a path to college and career success is the responsibility of the entire community."* This belief recognizes and embraces the role that public education can have for our community during a time in our nation where racial injustices are starkly revealed. As an educational institution, we hold great potential for reducing racial and social inequities over time as we have the responsibility of investing in our children from an early age, taking measures to ensure that environmental influences don't determine what children can achieve with the talents and dreams they possess.

We, as a district, pledge to hold ourselves accountable for inactions that have historically burdened our diverse students and families. Accepting accountability means not simply denouncing racism and racist behavior within our system, but taking actionable and measurable steps that bring about significant improvement over the near and long term. Experiencing moments of disruption and discomfort will be an inevitable part of this journey.

Since July 2019, we've made marked improvements in uncovering and addressing systemic biases in our longstanding policies and procedures across every facet of the organization. This has been made possible through organizational restructuring and the development of a strategic plan upon which we now center our school budget decisions. Some steps we have already taken since the beginning of the school year include:

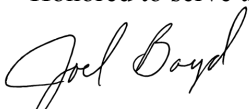
- *Adopting a fair student funding model which ensures that the dollars that come into the district are now truly following students.* This means not only directing more money directly to school sites – thus reducing central office funding – but ensuring that schools with higher need populations receive greater resources in a systematic way based on the differentiated needs of the students they are serving. We believe that the people closest to our students are the ones best equipped to make decisions on their behalf, so we prioritized the School Site Council process which includes family members and community representatives in the decision-making for the school. In just one year, we were able to increase the level of school-based budgeting autonomy from just 1% of decisions to 67%, an important structural step in establishing the types of targeted support needed to close the racial and linguistic gaps in achievement that exist within and among our schools.
- *Actively working to eliminate race-based barriers in recruitment and hiring.* This has resulted in the appointment of the most diverse leadership team in recent district history, which includes the creation of an Equity and Engagement Officer position at the executive cabinet-level.

- *Taking an unapologetic stance that our students need to see themselves reflected in the staff who serve them and their families.* We implemented anti-bias training for hiring committees and developed a diversity recruitment and hiring initiative. Since July 2019, 63% of all new hires at Central Office have identified as people of color. Likewise, we prioritized the restoration of the district's bilingual family liaisons whose role is to empower our linguistically diverse families with information and provide training to them on ways they can advocate for their children within their schools. Additionally, we instituted a translation and interpretation initiative to enable staff and families to communicate in the preferred language of the family, focusing on the top seven languages spoken within our district– Arabic, Khmer, Lao, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili and Vietnamese.
- *Committing to a diversity recruitment, hiring and retention plan.* With the grant support of the Parker Foundation and in partnership with the education department at UMASS Lowell and Project LEARN, we have begun the implementation of our Diversifying Teacher Leaders initiative, which is one of several strategies for increasing the recruitment, hiring and retention of diverse staff within our district. With the support of our community partners and grant funders, our diversity recruitment, hiring and retention initiative has undoubtedly become one of the strongest initiatives among public organizations in the city.
- *Elevating student voice.* Through listening sessions, our high school students highlighted the need for LPS to accelerate our plans to provide additional training in culturally and linguistically responsive practices and anti-racism across our district. Through our strategic planning process over the past 9 months, we set goals for further diversifying curriculum and ensuring our staff at all levels of the organization receive on-going and targeted training next year through a phased approach in order to create lasting change.
- *Elevating family and community voices.* Through our Portrait of a Graduate initiative – funded by the Barr Foundation – we're looking forward to empowering diverse community organizations and youth leaders this summer to conduct their own community-based participatory action research processes which will culminate in recommendations to the district reflecting different communities' visions for a high school graduate – including the academic skills, mindsets and values that we want our students to acquire through their education with Lowell Public Schools.

We recognize that there is still much work to do to ensure every child in Lowell – regardless of race, language or economic circumstance – has equitable access to a public education that will help them achieve their greatest potential. Sustaining these steps will be the true test over time. Our progress in advancing an equity agenda can perhaps offer one example for how initial steps can be taken by a large system despite the cost-constrained environment that every organization now finds itself in due to COVID19. Strong relationships with intergovernmental partnerships across the city also play a key role in the levels of success the district can achieve, and I am appreciative of and confident in the leadership of the Mayor, City Manager and Police Chief for their willingness to collaborate with the district and advance Lowell as a city at the forefront of policies and actions that promote true social justice.

Finally, Lowell Public Schools welcomes partnerships with non-profit, municipal, community-based and faith-based organizations and committed individuals in this collective work as we know that true and sustainable change requires collaborative and unified efforts toward dismantling racism in our community.

Honored to serve the students and families of Lowell,



Dr. Joel D. Boyd
Superintendent of Schools