



Franklin Public Schools

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October 27, 2021

Dear Franklin Community,

It is with a heavy heart and sincere anger that I write regarding the events that transpired at last evening's School Committee meeting. The conduct, tone, and disruption by some members of the audience was appalling and a violation of Franklin Public Schools' core values of a safe and inclusive environment and a collaborative community as well as unacceptable with respect to public meeting procedures. It is also contrary to the community's consensus vision for our graduates of empathetic and productive citizens who demonstrate social-awareness through inclusivity and the consideration of various perspectives.

Franklin School Committee meetings are business meetings of the governing body of the school district that are held in public. They are not public meetings. The agenda for these meetings and opportunities for citizen's comments is prescribed by School Committee policy. This is a controlled environment, however, last night I felt compelled to interrupt the meeting by asking for a recess due to a few audience members shouting insensitive comments out of turn while a student representative was speaking.

The student representative was expanding upon comments she made at a recent School Committee meeting as a member of the LGBTQ+ community in response to graffiti that was found at Franklin High School. She was permitted by the Chair to respond to a question raised during public comment regarding the meaning of protected classes within the school as well as in society as a whole. The student was eloquent and articulate in her response.

The jeers from some audience members, however, created a traumatic situation for the student and invalidated her statement of reality she so courageously shared. We are processing the impact of this traumatic event on those in attendance as well as the vicarious trauma ringing throughout the community. You can expect FPS to solidify a system to protect students during civil discourse and share plans for community healing in the coming week.

FPS plays a role in supporting the children of our community through a pivotal time of their social, emotional, and physical development. This is a time where children are trying to make meaning of the world around them, while also coming into their own identity. Whole child learning calls for our curriculum and initiatives to be appropriately tied to the developmental stages of our students. While students are getting acclimated with their own identities and experiences, FPS recognizes that the intersectionality of those identities inform the lens through which our children navigate our community. Fostering a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion means integrating those concepts into the fabric of our district as a whole. These efforts are echoed by the creation of our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.

The [D, E, I Committee](#) is a group of nearly 40 students, faculty and staff members, and administrators who are working towards building an anti-biased and socially-just school system. This steering committee leads the district in listening, learning, acting, and reflecting in order to affirm diversity, promote equity and

accountability, reduce barriers to success, and foster a safe and inclusive school environment. We do this by applying an anti-bias lens to curriculum development, staff recruitment and retention, professional development, policies and practices, school culture, and communication. Goals for the 2021-2022 school year include:

- Building awareness of and guidance on national months of recognition and holidays
- Building upon "[Speak Up At School](#)" strategies to interrupt microaggressions
- Revising discipline practices to focus on Restorative and Accountable Practices
- Incorporating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into our curriculum and instructional planning, including the expansion of literature so that all students are represented in the books they read
- Continuing our partnership with the Anti-Defamation League in support of our World of Difference™ Peer Leader program at Franklin's middle schools and Franklin High School
- Expanding our partnership with the Anti-Defamation League to become designated as "No Place for Hate" schools
- Review data for inequity and plan future actions to address these

Additionally, we are planning to recruit and hire a Director of SEL and Equity.

In the meantime, we would like to remind our community of our system of reporting. Our administrators take every incident that is reported very seriously. Reporters can make reports directly to a school administrator. Additionally, reporters can make reports anonymously through an [online form](#), which can be found on each school's website. When a report is received, an investigation is initiated immediately. The facts of each situation determine the outcomes which can include support plans for the target(s), safety plans for the aggressor(s), education, discipline, and therapeutic supports. We acknowledge comments we have heard from those who feel that the administration doesn't do anything. We are exploring the disconnect between our actions and those feelings in order to better understand how we can respond, to the extent possible within law and policy.

Some lingering questions remain from last night as a question was raised about the meaning of a "protected student" and this was an area that our student representative sought to explain. All of our students are protected by our [Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan](#), an expectation supported by state law and our School Committee's [Bullying](#) policy. A "protected class" is a federal and state legal definition protecting individuals on the basis of the following categories: race, color, creed, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, genetic information, disability, pregnancy or a related condition, veteran status, age, or homelessness. The Franklin School Committee maintains policies related to [Non-Discrimination](#) and [Harassment](#). In addition to the legal requirements to follow the law, it is a moral imperative to protect all individuals with additional attention to these protected classes due to historic acts of marginalization, bias, and discrimination.

Our community has expressed via social forums their support for our student representative and the student population at large. Ultimately, our collective goal is to support students on their journeys. I encourage individuals to reflect on what actions they can take to support our community vision for our FPS students and Franklin community.

I want to be sure to commend our Science National Honor Society officers for their concluding remarks promoting positivity, diversity, equity, and inclusion which provided support to our student representatives.

Last night's disruption is not an isolated incident. Vitriol in civil discourse has only been increasing in both in-person settings as well as online in Franklin and elsewhere. This is true for children and adults alike. Last

night's disruption is not limited to the schools. Bias-based behavior is permeating layers of the community. As adults, I implore you to be mindful of your behavior as you serve as important role models. Our children are watching.

This message is not intended to stifle respectful public comment including matters on which we may disagree. Citizen's comment is an opportunity for members of the public to express an opinion on issues within the School Committee's authority. We ask that you celebrate and practice civility in doing so and remain respectful of the rules of order. Administrative channels may also be appropriate avenues for complaints. We strive to respond in a timely manner after researching an issue.

I also encourage our community members to make advocacy and support for each and every child visible and sustained. Join us and "Speak Up" within the community. We need your help in achieving the vision for our graduates that we as a community established.

With respect for all in Franklin,

Sara Ahern
Superintendent of Schools