



MEDIA STATEMENT

April 12, 2021

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION ISSUES REPORT

On Friday afternoon, the Burlington Area School District received a ruling from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) pertaining to a discrimination complaint that was filed in March 2020. We respect the expertise of DPI, as well as their decision.

The Burlington Area School District would never intentionally treat Black and Brown students differently based on race. We most certainly regret leaving anyone impacted or feeling this way. We have been proactively working to reject all forms of racism, discrimination, and harassment and share in the goal to dismantle racism in Burlington.

Broadly speaking, the ruling contains the following:

- The District discriminated against the student by disciplining her more harshly than a white counterpart
- A racially hostile environment existed, the District was aware, and the District failed to appropriately respond
- The District didn't follow its policy / procedures with regard to reporting to DPI and limiting the scope of the investigation to not include the complainant's other child at the High School
- The District's discrimination complaint procedures don't comply with the law because they don't include the 90-day timeline

Further, the Department of Public Instruction outlined steps as corrective actions, many of which the district has already taken action:

1. Prevent further instances of discrimination in discipline
2. Adequately redress the racially hostile environment present in BASD
3. Review its past reporting on discrimination complaints to ensure compliance with BASD policies and procedures and enact clear guidelines for future reporting
4. Revise its policies and procedures to ensure they are in compliance with the Wisconsin Administrative Code

BASD continues to work with DPI on reporting requirements and will do everything to comply. Recently, the School Board adopted an anti-racism policy, replacing the previous non-discrimination policy, required by state and federal law and propelling the district into a new era.

A new, comprehensive student anti-harassment/anti-racism policy adopted on November 30, 2020 creates an overarching commitment from which further guidelines, rules, and actions will come and that is in compliance with the Wisconsin Administrative Code.

Policy is a distinct first step, but words alone will not eliminate racism in our community. The next steps will set the course for a stronger district.

Already, education and training is taking place districtwide. Student clubs have been established to give students a safe space to share and discuss their experiences. We will be intentional and thoughtful about ongoing progress.

This work is imperative. Why? Because one in five students in the Burlington Area School District is a minority. We need to create an environment where every student feels like they can succeed. We thought we had that. The stories of current and former students who have come forward make us realize that there is a side of our community unseen until more recently. We are stunned and enraged by the peer-to-peer microaggressions, racist vandalism on school property, individuals continuing to use racial slurs, and other acts that create a hostile environment and we will continue to address these wrongdoings directly.

Equity will continue to drive our conversations. Equity must be evident in all that we do within the district. We will work to harness the different voices in the community to make our schools more inclusive and welcoming to all.

We need to rebuild the community's trust and confidence. Our community, though diverse in thought, has a shared goal. We all want what is best for our students, the next generation of leaders. Let them witness us working together to heal our community.

The Burlington Area School District continues as an excellent district with a lot to offer the Burlington community. It has been uncomfortable to realize that even as we try our best - every day for every student - we need to do better.

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Equity Statement / Vision

The Burlington Area School District rejects all forms of racism, discrimination and harassment of students, families, staff members, and / or visitors in our schools. Such behaviors will be treated as being destructive to the District's mission, vision, values, and goals. The District pledges and is committed to providing a physically and psychologically safe, secure and respectful environment, free from discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, and national origin.