



July 1, 2020

**RE: Burlington Coalition for Dismantling Racism's Peaceful Protest and Other Assertions**

The Burlington Area School District (BASD) is aware that the Burlington Coalition for Dismantling Racism (BCD-Racism) has planned a **peaceful protest for the morning of Thursday, July 2 outside of the District Office**, with plans to travel to the Burlington Mayor's office at City Hall. Within their communication are a few additional assertions that are addressed below.

**Hiring Practices** - *The Coalition asserts that the BASD has "inequitable hiring practices." They state that "the district refused to hire a qualified black assistant principal for Burlington High School & instead, hired a white person with less experience."*

While it is not our practice to disclose details related to personnel matters, we are able to confirm that Burlington High School conducted an interview process for an Assistant Principal in April 2020 with the School Board approving the recommended candidate at their May 14, 2020 board meeting.

The goal of BASD's collaborative hiring process is to identify the very best candidate for the position and make a recommendation to hire to the School Board. BHS's vacant assistant principal position received 69 applications. Sixteen applicants were interviewed in the first round by four BHS staff and administrators. Five applicants participated in the final round of interviews with fourteen staff on the final interview team.

The Burlington Area School District sent a letter to families and staff ([Seeking Solidarity](#)) on June 3, 2020, after the BHS assistant principal hire. We continue to be committed to equitable hiring practices and hiring a diverse workforce.

**Student Suspension Data** - *The Coalition asserts "that the BASD suspension rates were 25 times higher for 39 black students in the entire district than 2505 white students."*

According to WiseDash suspension data from the 2018-2019 ([Most Recent Data Available](#)):

- Black - 43 students - 4 suspensions - 9.3%
- White - 2523 students - 54 suspensions - 2.1%

This data confirms that in the 2018-2019 school year, the suspensions of black students compared to their white counterparts were 4.45 times greater, not 25 times. We recognize that this is an area where we can explore a more restorative approach to student discipline.

**Racism in Schools** - *The Coalition asserts that "black kids we're being called the n-word on a daily basis and Mexican kids we're being called beaners and wetbacks; and we're being asked if they climbed the wall and if Trump knows that they're here. Also, white students were regularly displaying Confederate flags on their person, lockers and vehicles."*

The BASD has no evidence to support the assertion about these behaviors having merit. That said, we fully recognize that there are past and present student-to-student microaggressions that may or may not be intended as racist but inflict harm to others and communicate hostility and negativity. We know this can be hurtful and will continue to do all we can to ensure that every student and staff member feels welcome and valued in our schools and within the Burlington community.

**Anti-Racism Policy** - *The Coalition shared comprehensive anti-racism policy suggestions at the April 13 school board meeting.* The district is currently working through a thorough review and update of all of its policies. Specifically we are working to ensure all of our policies are aligned to current Federal and State Statutes. As we work through all the policies, we are mindful of any practices that conflict with our endeavor to provide a safe and welcoming environment. Finally, once the aforementioned policies have been worked through, our Board can more specifically look at including anti-racist language.

Our current policy about harassment can be found here - [Harassment of / by Students Policy #495](#)

Our Non-Discrimination Statement:

The Burlington Area School District, in accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and other Federal and State regulations, hereby declares that it is committed to the principle of equal education and employment opportunity and, accordingly, does not discriminate as to sex, race, color, national origin, ancestry, creed, pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, or physical, mental, emotional, or learning disability. Any inquiries or complaints alleging non-compliance with Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 or other Federal and State civil rights or non-discrimination regulations shall be referred to the Title IX coordinator of the Burlington Area School District. The Burlington Area School District will make reasonable accommodations for a qualified individual with a disability and requests for accommodations should be directed to the Assistant Superintendent, at 262-763-0210 or 100 North Kane Street Burlington WI, 53105.

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**Petition Response**

We are aware of a petition circulating (but has not yet been delivered) that calls on the Burlington Area School District to, in short, update curriculum to include black history, require diversity and inclusion training, increase the number of educators of color in our district, and encourage other districts in doing the same. We stand by our statement that we will confront any inequities that have seeped into our culture to ensure that all feel equally valued.

Based on what has been stated in the news about the petition, the Superintendent has drafted this response to the petition:

I write to you today representing the BASD as an educator, school leader and member of the greater Burlington community. The recently circulated petition by the Burlington Coalition for Dismantling Racism garnered a growing number of signatures. The experiences that have generated this petition and the personal stories behind these signatures are filled with raw emotion and sincerity. I, too, wish to be an ally in the efforts to put an end to the racism that causes anguish in our community and our country. I see the BASD as partners in making change happen in our community.

The Burlington Coalition for Dismantling Racism has brought forth four desired outcomes, in short, to: update curriculum, require diversity and inclusion training, increase the number of educators of color in our district, and encourage other districts to follow our lead are acknowledged. The BASD has been pursuing action around your four points and more to take an aggressive stance toward eliminating racism in the Burlington area community.

Allow me to share some background and perspective related to the requests in this petition.

**Craft a comprehensive Elementary, Middle and High School curricula plan inclusive of black history and specifically addressing systemic racism and white privilege.**

Curriculum development is complex, takes time and is driven by mandatory requirements and community expectations. While our curriculum does include some content related to black history, we want to understand what is being taught, what gaps exist, and pursue, in earnest, filling those gaps with meaningful curriculum.

Further, we seek to give students opportunities to express themselves. In addition to hosting diversity events, we plan to create diversity clubs at the middle and high school where students can engage in conversations around race and diversity.

**Require diversity and inclusion training for all faculty.**

To better understand diversity and inclusion training in the context of our learning community, district leadership has participated in training to better understand problems we need to solve. In October 2019, the district hosted **Luis Cruz** for an all-day in-service. Cruz ([Bio](#)) worked with staff on how to create inclusive environments to ensure all students learn.

**Intentionally work to hire more educators who are people of color so that our students can learn from the collective experiences and knowledge of a diverse faculty.**

As a state and as a profession, we have significant work to do to attract and retain educators that bring diverse experiences. The BASD recognizes there is a growing teaching shortage. Further it is becoming increasingly difficult to find teachers with the specialized skills we need, such as special education and speaking Spanish. This study on [Race Relational Trust and Teacher Retention](#) states that, "Outside of Milwaukee Public Schools, only .6% of teachers are African American and 1.3% are Latinx. Because of the scarcity of teachers of color across the state, 86% of all Wisconsin schools do not have any African American teachers and 83% do not have any Latinx teachers."

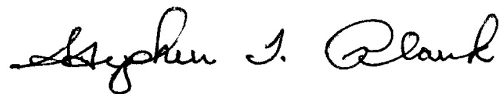
**Encourage its peer schools in the Racine County area.**

Districts across Wisconsin can do better and we believe the BASD is viewed by many as a leader. We take this leadership role seriously knowing that many will follow our lead.

As educators, I believe it is our responsibility to help Burlington students learn. Now, more than ever, we renew our commitment to a comprehensive education that is steeped in immense compassion for each and every student.

In closing, please understand that we agree on the goals brought forth in the petition. And, in some cases, we've already started the hard work necessary to achieve these goals. This work will take time to get it right, while balancing all of the needs the community expects of its public school system.

We approach this complex problem from a position of hope and we seek to help heal the hurt in our community. We thank you for your partnership in this effort.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen T. Plank". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'S' and 'P'.

Stephen T. Plank, Superintendent