

RECORD OF THE EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE BROOKLINE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ON **SUNDAY, MARCH 20, 2022** AT 4:00 PM (REMOTE VIA ZOOM). STATUTORY NOTICE OF THIS MEETING WAS FILED WITH THE TOWN CLERK.

School Committee Members Present: David Pearlman (Vice Chair), Helen Charlupski, Susan Wolf Ditkoff, Steven Ehrenberg, Valerie Frias, Andreas Liu, Jennifer Monopoli, and Mariah Nobrega. School Committee Members Absent: Suzanne Federspiel (Chair). Also present: Linus Guillory, Sam Rippin, Lesley Ryan Miller, Erin Cooley, Tye'sha Fluker, Jenee Uttaro, and Robin Coyne.

Mr. Pearlman called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

1. DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE TO RECENT INCIDENTS AT BROOKLINE HIGH SCHOOL (BHS) AND WITHIN THE COMMUNITY
a. Public Comment

The following people provided public comment about recent racist and antisemitic incidents at BHS and student/administration/School Committee response: Anoush Najarian, Azavia Barsky-Elnour, Grace Watson, Abby Erdmann, Anne Weaver, Igor Golger, Savyon Cohen, Connie Clauson, Bonnie Bastien, Ronald Wilkinson, Britt Stevens, Deborah Brown, Maggie Canniff, Jessica Wender-Shubow, Carin Aquiline, Lindsay Linton, Raul Fernandez, Steve Watson, Ann Poduri, Soyoung Kim, Monica Grace, Arthur Conquest, Kathy Hitchcock, Rob Primmer, Faith Dantowitz, and Miriam Aschkenasy.

Speakers commented on the most recent incidents of racism and antisemitism that have impacted the BHS community. Speakers expressed anger and disappointment with the administration's response to the incidents and praised the students who spoke out against hate in the BHS community and the need for change. The School Committee and administration need to listen to and engage with students and parents/caregivers, but ultimately need to take responsibility and be held accountable for combatting and addressing racism, sexism, antisemitism, ableism, anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination, xenophobia, and any other form of bigotry and harassment in the schools. The District needs to make it completely clear that this type of hate is not acceptable. Work with students must start at the PreK level. The District needs to be held accountable for making sure that all students and staff feel safe and the District needs to apologize when mistakes are made.

Speakers implored the District to address these issues with a sense of urgency and take the following steps: establish a School Committee Subcommittee to address issues of equity and justice; expand efforts to hire and retain PSB educators and administrators of color; apply an equity lens to all decisions, policies, and School Improvement Plans; reinstate the half-time guidance position in the Alternative Choices in Education (ACE) Program; work with staff and students to stop micro-aggressions; engage in this work even when it is difficult and uncomfortable; acknowledge and address the harm caused by social media; settle the contract with the Brookline Educators Union, address

achievement gaps; create transparent guidelines with meaningful consequences; provide training so that all teachers and administrators are able to support students; commit resources towards eliminating hate in the schools and invest in programs that disproportionately benefit students and staff of color, including an increase in the number of METCO seats; promote real change to eliminate the culture of racism in the Town and Schools and don't just react to specific incidents; work with both special education and general education teachers to understand and address intersectionality with disability; and avoid any actions that could pit groups against each other. Many of the speakers spoke of the importance of involving all parents/caregivers in these efforts, and offered their assistance.

Mr. Pearlman noted that the School Policy Review Subcommittee is currently working on a Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) Equity Policy, and will be considering changes to the PSB Anti-Bullying Policy and the PSB Anti-Harassment Policy. The Subcommittee will be meeting on March 22, 2022 to consider policies, and a proposed School Committee Statement in Response to Recent Racist and Antisemitic Incidents and Student Walkouts. The Subcommittee welcomes input from community members during its meetings.

School Committee members expressed their appreciation to members of the public who spoke so passionately today and to those members of the community who submitted written comments. School Committee members, Dr. Guillory, and other Senior Administrators voiced their agreement with many of the comments and suggestions made today, including the need for the School Committee and administration to take specific actions and be held accountable for eliminating hate in the schools and supporting students and families who have been harmed by racism, sexism, antisemitism, ableism, anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination, xenophobia, and other forms of bigotry and harassment. School Committee members discussed specific steps, which are encompassed in the Statement below, voted on March 24, 2022.

***Brookline School Committee Statement in Response to
Recent Racist and Antisemitic Incidents and Student Walkouts
Voted March 24, 2022***

The recent incidents at Brookline High School are the latest examples showing that racism, sexism, antisemitism, ableism, anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination, xenophobia, and other forms of bigotry and harassment across all of our schools must be combated with renewed urgency and vigor. We are proud of the students who organized and participated in last weeks' protests. In so many ways, they are leading the adults; we are grateful for their advocacy, but they are children under our care who rely upon us to foster a school environment of safety, respect, and dignity.

As the elected officials overseeing the Public Schools of Brookline, we are ultimately accountable for the school system and the success of every student within. And we can and will do better.

Specific actions we will take, starting immediately:

- *We will pursue training in anti-discrimination and anti-racist leadership for the School Committee, and routinely refresh this training.*
- *We will empower the superintendent of PSB to embed diversity and a commitment to inclusion, equity and justice across every element of the district's strategic plan to be developed this year, and we commit to identifying or reallocating resources to support this work. The superintendent's evaluation rubric will explicitly include Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEI-J).*
- *We have established a subcommittee on anti-racism, diversity, equity, inclusion and justice that will include in its charge an action plan for the School Committee, aligned with the district strategic plan. As a part of this plan, the subcommittee will explore ways to address not only overt forms of racism, bigotry, discrimination, and harassment, but also micro aggressions and implicit bias.*
- *We will review the PSB Policy Handbook through an equity lens, including possible formulation of an anti-hate speech and iconography policy.*
- *We recognize the importance of having a School Committee, an administration, and a teaching staff that are more representative of the families that we serve. As a first step, we will explore ways to empower traditionally marginalized communities with opportunities for direct participation in School Committee affairs, including but not limited to appointment of liaisons from these communities (e.g., METCO).*
- *We will work with PSB administration to ensure clear and transparent mechanisms for reporting racism, bigotry, discrimination, and harassment against students and staff.*

These actions are important district-wide, pre-K through Grade 12, and are aligned with the Committee's legal powers and duties to evaluate the superintendent, oversee and approve the district budget, and establish district educational goals and policies.

For those who are skeptical of this commitment - we hear you: the School Committee has not always led in this area, and will certainly make mistakes. We look forward to continued open dialogue with, and feedback from, the PSB community.

Finally, while we are ultimately responsible for PSB, we ask the caregiver community to partner with us and with PSB staff: make clear that there is no place for racism, sexism, antisemitism, ableism, anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination, xenophobia, and other forms of bigotry and harassment of any kind. Through the home-school partnership, we can work together to promote a safe school environment that embraces the identity and individuality of every student.

2. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Pearlman adjourned the meeting at 7:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Robin E. Coyne, Executive Assistant
Brookline School Committee