

Menasha Joint School District Position Paper on Equity

All across the country school administrators and public health officials are working to come up with strategies to best protect students, educators, their families, and our community. Simultaneously, we need to develop and implement strategies to address the systemic racism that continues to exist in our education system, including the Menasha Joint School District (MJSD).

Systemic racism in education is largely reinforced by policies and practices that appear “race neutral” or “colorblind” on the surface, but result in inequitable outcomes. In the United States in 2020, racial disparities continue to exist in rates of graduation, educational attainment, special-education referrals, access to rigorous coursework, and highly qualified teachers, to name some examples. In Wisconsin, according to a report by The Civil Rights Project, black high school students are suspended at a higher rate than anywhere else in the country and we have the second-highest disparity in suspension rates between white and black elementary students. Based on the Nation’s Report Card, Wisconsin has the largest achievement gap between White and Black students.

In the MJSD we have been found to have disproportional classification for our students who identify as Black or as Two or More Races in the areas of Emotional/Behavior Disabilities (EBD) and Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). We also have concerns in the areas of attendance and graduation rates for these student groups.

One of the most important responsibilities of our MJSD Board of Education is to establish policies for the district and to ensure those policies are carried out with fidelity. These include policies governing equity, diversity, and inclusion. In addition, the Board of Education can and should speak out against injustice. We will continue to engage in this work transparently and collaboratively with stakeholder groups in our community.

We are committed to supporting our administrators, teachers, and staff in advancing anti-racism in our district and ensuring that all our students and their families, as well as our staff, have access to a safe, fair, trusting, and judgment-free atmosphere in our schools. Our core belief is that all young people deserve an equitable chance to reach their full potential. We work hard on many fronts to advance the hopes and dreams of the young people who need us most. We believe in them and trust that if we can help them believe in themselves, they can and will go off to become caring citizens and make their own lasting differences throughout their lives. We have implemented the STAR (Scholars on Target to Achieve Results) program specifically targeted to provide support for our Black students at Maplewood Middle School and Menasha High School (MHS). Last year, 94% (17/18) of STAR students graduated from MHS. We have also implemented a District Equity Committee which has resulted in several curricular adjustments and changes along with the creation of our MJSD Upstander program featuring representation in each of our school buildings.

We know we can do better for our students and families. The Menasha Joint School District is committed to the work that needs to be done to ensure that all of our students-particularly our students of color-are able to thrive in an equitable and anti-racist school environment. We will continue our efforts to build a school community that is based on inclusion and respect for diversity.