

Time to Reimagine: Milton Anti-Racist Coalition MPS Reform Platform

This document lays out the key principles, goals, and proposed strategies of the Milton Anti-Racist Coalition (MARC) Milton Public Schools Reform Platform. This is a preliminary draft of the platform that is expected to evolve over time. This platform was developed by a group of concerned parents and community members, and will be presented to MPS district and school leadership, the Milton School Committee, and MPS educators. Our aim is for MPS leadership and the school committee to adopt this platform, and to carry out the required work within the district, in partnership with MPS educators, parents, and community members who support this platform. Public comments of support (revisions and additions) encouraged by July 3. Please sign on with your support.

Guiding Principles:

- An excellent educational system is one that provides the optimal academic, social, emotional and sociocultural experiences that help every student in the district realize their own full academic and developmental potential.
- An equitable educational system is one in which every child has the opportunities **they need** to develop and reach their own full potential, without discrimination or bias, ensuring that students who have not experienced the same level of access, opportunity or success receive the optimal experiences and supports they need. See Figure 1 (next page).
- Race exerts a powerful influence on policies, practices and interactions in every aspect of Milton Public Schools in ways that can hinder or limit learning for students of color, and reduce the likelihood that students of color reach their own full potential. Racism in our educational system also limits White youths' access to a rich, robust, and diverse range of ideas and histories, and to the knowledge and skills needed to confront racism in policies, ideas, and actions.
- An anti-racist educational system provides anti-racist pedagogy, curriculum, and student support, where challenging intellectual discourse about race and racism is encouraged and fostered in every classroom (from preschool to grade 12) as developmentally appropriate, and where every classroom is a truly safe space for learning and discourse, and that works systematically and aggressively to identify and root out practices that perpetuate interpersonal racism, and to analyze and change policies and practices that perpetuate institutional racism, i.e. policies that allow racial inequities in learning opportunities to persevere.
- An anti-racist educational system does not treat intellectual discourse about race, racism and other important social issues as a peripheral or secondary academic goal, but rather frames developing the research, reading, writing, and analytic skills to deeply consider these issues as central to the core purpose of education (Perry, 2017).
- An anti-racist educational system engages educators and students in explicitly rejecting pernicious stereotypes about the intellectual superiority or inferiority of any racial-ethnic group; presents counter-narratives that challenge these stereotypes; and makes clear to all students “how this journey of achievement has been made by individuals like them” (Perry, 2017)
- An anti-racist educational system explicitly supports all youths' development of positive racial-ethnic identities. For youth of color, such development entails opportunities to learn about and take pride in their group's history, traditions, and ways of being as well as preparation for discriminatory experiences. For White students, such development entails recognizing the personal and societal significance of their Whiteness, rejecting assumptions of superiority, and learning to feel good about their Whiteness in the context of working toward a more just society.

- **An excellence-with-equity, anti-racist educational system is one that “raises the bar and closes gaps”**—i.e. it continually raises the bar for achievement and student learning overall, while bringing up students (and groups of students) that are farthest behind the fastest; and it does this through systemic anti-racist policies and practices that acknowledge the negative impacts of racism on everyone, but that disproportionately impact the success of students of color, and in particular subgroups such as black boys. The primary focus of this type of system is not narrowly on closing gaps between groups on state tests, but on ensuring that every individual student in the district is supported to make progress towards standards of mastery and excellence in their learning.
 - This type of school district:
 - Is one in which every educator believes that all students can do rigorous academic work, feel a strong sense of efficacy about their ability to support all students in achieving at high levels, and are committed to making challenging curriculum available to all students (Perry, 2017).
 - Works for *all* children, meeting each student, every day, *where they are* with the opportunities and supports *they need* to maximize their full potential
 - It **differentiates supports** to help each student pursue excellence in their learning, with a focus on providing the right support at the right time for each student (i.e. equitable supports), rather than a focus on providing equal supports (i.e. the same) to everyone.
 - In this type of district, excellence and equity are inextricably linked – one cannot exist without the other

Figure 1. Equality vs. equity in the short and long term



In this first image, it is assumed that everyone benefits from the same support. They are being treated **equally**.



Individuals are given different support to make it possible for them to have equal access to the view. They are being treated **equitably**.



All three can see the view without any support because the cause of inequality was addressed. The systemic barrier has been **removed**.

MARC MPS Reform goals:

- **Overarching goal: Transform Milton Public Schools to an excellence-with-equity, anti-racist exemplar educational system that works for *all* of its students, where:**
 - All students have the optimal academic, social, emotional and sociocultural experiences that allow them to realize their own full academic and developmental potential.
 - Students' learning opportunities (i.e. challenging coursework and academic rigor, high-quality instruction, deep engagement, and high teacher expectations) are *equitable*, with priority attention to ensuring that students who have not experienced the same level of access, opportunity or success receive the optimal experiences and supports they need to fulfill their academic and developmental potential.
 - All students receive an anti-racist education where students are educated by a racially and ethnically diverse team of skilled teachers; where all educators are equipped and supported to be "courageous, persistent and effective in confronting and resolving racial and cultural issues that impact everyone but disproportionately impact the academic and social emotional success of students of color"¹; where curriculum (starting in preschool classrooms) explicitly and progressively educates children about the origins, true and comprehensive history, forms, nature, and consequences of race and racism, and equips students to identify and confront interpersonal and institutional racism in their everyday lives.
- **Districtwide goals – evidence of success:**
 - **Over the long term, overall student learning and achievement has continually increased across the district, and there is no racial predictability of student achievement (i.e. a child's race tells us nothing about their achievement level or academic growth).**
 - Over the medium term, we see consistent evidence of increased student learning overall, with the most rapid gains in student learning experienced by focal groups who have historically had lower access, opportunity and success in MPS.
- **Establish a robust, rigorous accountability and educator support framework that demonstrates district leadership's commitment to working relentlessly and transparently towards these goals, and that includes appropriate accountability measures and systems that empower multiple key stakeholders (school committee, parents, students, educators/union, the public) to hold MPS district and school leaders accountable, modeled after nationally recognized districts (e.g. Montgomery County Public Schools [Equity Accountability Framework](#)); and where district and school leaders effectively support every MPS educator in their efforts to work towards these goals.**

Strategies:

The overarching strategy supported by the platform is one that starts with a critical in-depth learning phase, where all aspects of the MPS system are reviewed with an equity and anti-racism lens. Learning should be followed by an in-depth visioning and planning period that is directly informed by the learning phase. The visioning and planning phase will culminate in a revised district strategic plan and supporting MPS policies. Visioning and planning is followed by implementation. All MPS administrators and educators carry out the implementation of the

¹ Adapted from Montgomery County Public Schools Equity Initiatives Unit.

selected strategies and approaches, and a new Equity and Anti-Racism Office provides educators with the ongoing supports and appropriate learning and accountability systems to advance the work. Phase 4 happens after an initial implementation period of three years, and is focused on sustaining and continuously improving the work of the district over time.

Four phases (*asterisk indicates to see below for additional details):

Phase 1: Learning

- Conduct systematic district review with equity lens by external consultant* (to be completed **by Oct 2020**)
- Listen to parents* (to be completed by **Sept 30, 2020**)
- Learn from best practices and approaches in other districts
- Culminates in a detailed public report and presentation of findings **by Dec 2020**
- Develop affinity groups for teachers and students as part of a larger strategic effort in providing safe spaces and listening to all stakeholders **by January 2021**
- Conduct a study - student of color voices and experiences in MPS to drive the transformation from youth voices **by December 2020**

Phase 2: Visioning and planning: Consensus-building around priorities, develop action plan, select strategies, develop accountability framework (internal and external)

- Establish (staff and fund) MPS Equity and Anti-racist Office **by March 2021**
- Culminates in a revised district strategic plan developed by MPS for public comment **by March 2021**
- Plan finalized and approved by School Committee **by May 2021**

Phase 3: Implementation (June 2021-June 2024)

- New MPS Equity and Anti-racism Office is established as a central hub for supporting educators, students and parents that provides implementation support, and establishes internal learning and accountability systems
- Three year preliminary implementation period with bi-monthly implementation progress reporting to school committee and parent advisory; and quarterly public reporting
- Mid-course implementation study conducted 18 months into implementation period (culminates in public report and presentation in **Dec 2022**)
- Formative and summative evaluation study conducted at the end of initial three year implementation period (culminates in public report in **Dec 2024**)

Phase 4: Ongoing implementation support, learning, continuous improvement, accountability (June 2021-perpetuity)

***Systematic district review with equity lens:**

The systematic district review with an equity lens should be conducted by an external consultant, or team of consultants, with extensive expertise in school and district quality reviews with an equity or cultural lens. It should start by identifying and documenting racial disparities (i.e. differences in evidence of learning, including achievement levels, academic growth, and student engagement), which can be a warning sign of racial inequities in learning opportunities that are a result of racial bias (interpersonal or institutional).

From there, the consultant will systematically review students' learning and developmental opportunities to identify racial inequities that could be reinforcing disparities. **Reviewers should investigate, with an equity lens, whether and how opportunities to learn vary by race, with a focus on examination of essential dimensions of and conditions for student learning where schools too often fall short, including challenging coursework, high-quality teaching, deep engagement, and teachers with high expectations.** There will also be

analysis of criteria for placement into student supports (e.g. special education), specialty programs (e.g. French immersion and AP and honors course placement policies/procedures), and the related role and practices of guidance and adjustment counselors. From a developmental perspective, approaches to behavioral practices, discipline, youth development, and student engagement will be analyzed.

The systematic review should include multiple modes of investigation, including document review and analysis (e.g. MPS policies and strategic plan), key stakeholder interviews with district and school leadership, school committee members, teachers, parents, and community members. The review should take a 360 approach, starting with listening to parents, particularly parents of color within MPS. Recent parent convenings led by MARC organizers reveal that the experiences of parents of color--which the district must learn from and address--have been hidden and isolated, instead of consolidated and amplified. Moreover, we urge the review include classroom observations and school site visits, in-depth student, teacher, and parent perception surveys, and focus groups that investigate conditions inside classrooms in particular.

Key areas of interest for review include:

- Review of hiring, recruitment and retention approaches that lead to increased numbers of skilled educators of color, and skilled progressive educators. Analysis of whether hiring practices are effective at attracting educators with values aligned with an excellence with equity, anti-racist approach to education.
- Special focus on organizational, instructional, and behavioral practices and policies, and interpersonal experiences (for educators, parents, and students) at Pierce Middle School, with attention to concerns (raised by parents), including those related to racially disproportionate behavioral monitoring and disciplinary actions, school climate, youth development, and intellectual rigor and progressiveness of curriculum and pedagogy (i.e. teacher freedom in lesson plans)
- Review of curriculum, pedagogy, and materials/resources with an anti-racism lens (e.g., moving beyond current approach to African American history African-Americans from the lens of slavery through the civil rights movement to include the origins of Homo sapiens, study of pre-colonial African civilizations such as the kingdom of Mali and modern Africa, for example), and including a review of literature available to students in school libraries, elementary classrooms and assigned readings in the upper grades (whose stories are being told and how?).
- Approach to teacher support and professional development: Review of the quality of existing, and additional need for applied, ongoing, in-classroom instructional and classroom supports that go beyond cultural proficiency workshops.
- Expansion of existing excellence-with-equity programs with proven track record, e.g. The Calculus Project (which could start in Grade 6 or earlier, instead of in high school).
- In-depth review of district, school and instructional leadership competencies, commitment and readiness to lead the required planning and implementation of this work.
- Assess the need for, required funding levels, and optimal structure of an effective Equity and Anti-Racism Office to support educators, and to facilitate implementation and accountability over time, with attention paid to the optimal governance and reporting structure of this office (i.e. should this office fall under the jurisdiction of the Superintendent, the School Committee, the Town administration).
- Inequities in early childhood learning opportunities (before Kindergarten), and assessment of existing district approach to early learning (birth to age 4).
- Evaluation of existing district accountability framework.
- Near term focus on the district's preparation to handle the impact of the pandemic on students of color.