



Vision

We will build the foundation for all children to be their best, achieve their dreams, and make the world a better place.

Greetings DHS Students, Staff, and Community,

In December 2022, an incident at Decatur High School occurred that involved a racial slur used by a staff member in front of students. We have taken this incident as a learning opportunity and remain steadfast in CSD's clear focus on students as we confront and overcome racial, economic, and social injustices and disparities.

We acknowledge some critical errors were made by school and district administration. We sincerely apologize for those errors, as well as for the length of time that it took to address this incident.

CSD has engaged in a comprehensive and thoughtful review of the situation. The investigation was intended to help us find opportunities for improvement, craft a clear plan to address similar incidents, and ensure that we implement any needed improvements with fidelity. We recently received the results of a third-party investigation conducted by Dr. Tijuan Wilson and want to share next steps based on those recommendations.

Here is a detailed [timeline](#) of events as determined through an investigation by both the Superintendent's office and Dr. Wilson.

Upon the completion of the investigation, Dr. Wilson provided the district with the following recommendations:

1. Take Authentic Steps to Create an Anti-Racist/Equity-Oriented Culture
2. Issue an Authentic Apology to All Constituents and Provide Immediate Mental Health Support to Students and All District Staff
3. Engage in proactive Policy Review and Development and Create a Plan for Policy Dissemination (while coupling an anti-racist lens to all policies).
4. Develop a District Communications Team and Plan
5. Provide Restorative Justice Training to All Employees
6. Reimagine Teacher Evaluations
7. Develop a Reentry Team
8. Provide Training and Empowerment to the District Human Resources Team
9. Creation of a Black Teacher Safe Space
10. Hire a HR Team Member Devoted to Employee Relations
11. Hire an Equity Team Member Exclusively Devoted to Training and Professional Development for Students and Staff
12. Hire a Full-Time Communications Professional or Establish a Consulting Contract with a Public Relations and Communications Firm
13. Re-evaluate District Affinity Groups and Provide Executive Sponsorship

James Herndon
Chair

Carmen Sulton
Vice Chair

Tasha R. White
Board Member

Jana Johnson-Davis
Board Member

Hans Utz
Board Member

14. Consult with Your District Legal Team Early and Often
15. Provide Clarity Regarding the Role of the Equity Office
16. Develop a Centralized System for Reporting Racial Incident
17. Provide this Full List of Recommendations to All Learning Community

Here's what we are doing to act on these recommendations:

We are reimagining teacher evaluations. We are reimagining teacher evaluations to more accurately provide honest and open feedback that maximizes the experiences of students. This is an important component of the [Board's Theory of Action](#) approved in October 2022 and the pending approval of our new Strategic Plan. We have been working for several months with several district leaders, including our equity director, on re-envisioning evaluation tools.

Timing: We anticipate these evaluation tools, along with necessary employee and supervisor training, to roll out for the opening of next school year.

We will continuously strive to create a safe and receptive space for all our teachers. The perspectives of staff and faculty of the global majority are essential to our system. As a result, the district has provided multiple pathways for all employees to share their perspectives. For the past three years, we have provided opportunities for staff to engage with the Equity and Student Services Department through monthly Employee Resource Groups that address racial affinity, in which employees share experiences and needs. If they prefer, employees are also encouraged to use our [equity ideas and concerns portal](#) to address experiences and needs without meeting face-to-face. They are able to submit either anonymously or directly. Efforts will be made to further connect specifically with the high school staff of color to ensure they know these spaces exist and are available to them.

We are focused on stronger Restorative Practices. Restorative Practices are an important tool for how we repair relationships in CSD. We will create a plan for Restorative Practices to be implemented with fidelity at the high school, which will be reviewed annually.

Timing: Annually

We are strengthening established protocols for communication. A CSD Communication Plan and Handbook was developed several years ago. The plan has been shared with all CSD leaders and is continually updated. It is one of the key training resources we use in our CSD Leadership Academy and with all our new leaders. The Chief of Staff is refreshing the communication advisory team to ensure we have all key stakeholders represented and equitable representation of historically marginalized groups included on this team. This team will review and vet our communication protocols.

Timing: Annual re-training and tabletop exercises will be used to ensure that leaders are consistently implementing procedures and communicating with families and staff in a timely, transparent manner. Additionally, our PR team is auditing our communication channels and

supporting our communication coordinator in making improvements to our protocols. Finally, our Human Resources (HR) staff is trained in all areas of HR including employee relation issues, investigations, and legal compliance and the team continues to proactively attend trainings.

We are applying a racial-equity lens to communication. We remain continuously engaged in proactive policy review and development and apply a racial-equity lens for policy and procedure development and revision. For example, part of the immediate response to this incident was to develop a focused bias incident response toolkit, oriented around a mindset of “Prepare and Prevent” (“P²REP”). Work on this began within days of the initial incident. P²REP will strengthen communication specifically geared toward similar situations in the future. We will communicate with the District legal team early, often, and with complete information.

Timing: A final version of our P²REP protocol is expected to be adopted and implemented in the coming weeks.

We will provide clarity on the purpose of the Equity Department. The Equity Department welcomes any opportunity to further communicate its purpose to our stakeholders. Presently, the Equity Department facilitates a monthly gathering of every school’s equity team, works daily with school and department equity leads on acute and recurring issues, has presented to each school’s PTA, publishes a monthly equity newsletter, and curates [a robust website](#) with educator and family resources around applying equity best practices in our daily work. The Equity Department also collaborates with school and district leadership to address concerns submitted to through the Equity Concerns [form](#).

We will continue to support District affinity groups and provide executive sponsorship. For example, each year multiple all-calls are sent to CSD employees who may wish to engage in a Racial Affinity Group. Consequently, we have established an Asian American Pacific Islander Affinity Group (AAPI-RAG), a black male affinity group (BM-RAG), a black female affinity group (BF-RAG), a black multi-gender affinity group (B-RAG) and a white multi-gender racial affinity group (W-RAG). We are now in year three of that effort.

We will continue to use a centralized system for reporting racial incidents. For several years there have been links from the district equity homepage to an “[Equity Concerns Form](#)” and a more general “[Community Ideas or Concerns Form](#).” The equity website is pushed to every employee and student via [CSD LaunchPad](#), and it is prominently linked on other district and school webpages.

The Voice Box exists as an alternative, DHS-specific avenue for students to more immediately raise concerns with their school leadership. Although Voice Box submissions are not part of a “centralized” report from the equity website forms, submissions to the Voice Box are shared with the same Equity Department leadership. Anonymized Voice Box submission reports have been a regular and important part of the principal’s monthly senior leadership team reports, and a



helpful barometer for student needs. We are evaluating with the school, district, and student leaders the effectiveness of the Voice Box at DHS, and after thoughtful consideration, will decide whether to maintain, enhance, or retire it.

Timing: The evaluation of Voice Box at DHS is underway.

We are hiring new, key staff members to support these efforts. We plan to hire an additional HR team member devoted to employee relations to focus on taking a more proactive approach to supporting employees. Additionally, we will hire an Equity team member to support implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and leading professional development for staff.

Timing: These positions will be incorporated in the upcoming budget for Board approval, and if approved, we aim to have them filled going into the 2023-24 school year.

Principal Lofstrand and the teacher involved have been on alternative assignments since the incident so a thorough investigation could be completed. As a community, CSD must stand firm in our use of restorative practices to repair harm and reintegrate those who caused harm back into our community, when appropriate. Principal Lofstrand will return March 13. We are forming a Reentry Team composed of leaders and instructional staff, as well as a plan, around Principal Lofstrand's return. We are taking measured steps to meet the needs of employees, staff, and most importantly, impacted students. This reentry plan will include additional restorative work.

A decision around the teacher's return is yet to be made pending further review.

The culture we are building in City Schools of Decatur is built on restoration and healing. We will all continue to work together to make things better for the CSD community.

Please schedule a support session using this link if your child needs time to process or discuss this update with an adult using this [link](#). If this is an emergency need, your child can g-chat Dr. Kim Evans.

Staff who need support more information will be provided for opportunities for support when Ms. Lofstrand's reentry plan is shared. Staff can also use the [Employee Assistance Program](#) for immediate support.

CSD remains committed to being culturally responsive, culturally representative, and inclusive while encouraging and incubating honest and courageous discourse about the issues most important and sacred to the well-being of our country and democracy. This helps ensure our students grow into committed stewards of a country and world where marginalization, racism, racial and ethnic injustices and any and all discriminatory practices are rooted out and eradicated.



We welcome any additional thoughts or information that the DHS community would like to share regarding this issue.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly with any questions as we heal from this event and move forward.

In Solidarity,

Dr. Maggie Fehrman

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Superintendent

City Schools of Decatur

