



We are in receipt of your June 15, 2021 correspondence regarding the Sun Prairie Community Conversations event. While we fully understand the concerns you have raised, perhaps some perspective would be helpful.

Our purpose is to create safe and welcoming spaces to resolve our most significant issues of bias and inequity. As community leaders, we accept our responsibility to ensure that all children, all families, and all community members are well-served, and we are fully committed to meeting their needs, regardless of distractions that seek to deflect us from our values. We, the City and School District leadership, appreciate that there are people in our larger community that are vigilant about helping us meet our goal of being safe and welcoming.

The values of the Sun Prairie Area School District are captured in its vision, which aspires to be “Recognized as a high performance school district of choice that reflects the cultures of our diverse community.” In order to make progress toward this end, the district actively seeks opportunities to engage our community to better understand expectations and the experiences of those caregivers and students served. The Sun Prairie Area School District’s Equity Statement unapologetically states:

“We are committed to changing the foundational inequalities that we acknowledge exist in our system and unequivocally state as follows:

- We stand by all our students, staff, and families.
- We celebrate the values of our diverse community. We support and are inclusive of all students, staff, families, and community members of all races, ethnicities, faiths, national origins, socio-economic status, immigration status, political viewpoints, abilities, sexual orientations, and gender identities.
- We stand by our Black and Brown students, staff, and families of color. We will continue to speak and swiftly act against statements of bigotry, social injustice, discrimination, racism, and hate that may plague members of our community. We are committed to the development and implementation of strategies and best practices that dismantle bigotry, racism, and ethnic oppression within all aspects of our schools and school district.
- We stand by our lower socio-economic status students and their families. We will do all we can to meet the nutritional, physical, and emotional needs of all students regardless of their economic status.
- We stand by our immigrant students and families. All are welcome and safe in our schools regardless of immigration status.
- We stand by our students with disabilities and their families. We will continue to staunchly protect the rights of people of all abilities and to create educational environments where all educators collaborate for high educational outcomes for all students.

- We stand by our LGBTQIA+ students and staff. We take seriously our responsibility to provide safe, nondiscriminatory, and inclusive environments for people of all orientations and identities as they reflect our diverse community around us.

All children will be safe and loved in our schools.....Every Child, Every Day.”

While these statements have been unanimously approved by the Sun Prairie Area School District, the City of Sun Prairie also shares a vision for equity and inclusion: “Sun Prairie is committed to advancing **equity**, honoring our **diverse** identity, and creating an **inclusive** culture. These serve as our guiding principles every day in all that we do.”

The mission of the **Courageous Conversation Global Foundation** is to elevate racial consciousness through interracial healing. They further state: “We seek to unite people of all races to engage in the most effective precipitant of social change: authentic, sustained and compelling intra- and interracial dialogue. The conversations we foster create safe spaces for learning, solidarity and transformation to occur. If we are to eradicate racism, this is the hard work that must be done.”

On February 1, 2021 an incident occurred in the Sun Prairie Area School District at Patrick Marsh Middle School (PMMS). Three 6th-grade social studies/science teachers presented students with questions that were inappropriate and inconsistent with the SPASD’s vision and mission and outside of the approved district curriculum. Because this incident happened during the school day and in school classrooms, the district takes full responsibility for it. While the district has engaged in previous diversity, equity, and inclusion work, this event resulted in a catalyst for robust and actionable change and commitment to those values.

We know from feedback from our communities of color that the incident on February 1st in the Sun Prairie Area School District is not the first incident that has negatively impacted our communities of color, and that bias and racism are not confined to one area of the community. We are committed to engaging our communities to provide the space and place to process what happened. Because of a shared vision for advancing equity between the City of Sun Prairie and the School District, and because of our partnership in supporting the Sun Prairie Community Schools organization, we’ve brought together a collaborative cross-sector group of community leaders in the planning of this program.

In our effort to recognize past harms, **the Community Conversations on Race, Equity, and Inclusion Program** is an opportunity to come together as a community to process and collectively address prior challenges and co-create future solutions.

The Sun Prairie Community Schools organization is partnering with the Courageous Conversations Global Foundation to facilitate The Community Conversations on Race, Equity, and Inclusion. **Sun Prairie Community Schools** is a non-profit 501(c)(3) funded by the Sun Prairie Area School District and the City of Sun Prairie. The funding for this program comes from the Sun Prairie Community Schools budget. The Sun Prairie Area School District and the City of

Sun Prairie are in full support of this program and are grateful for the key strategy partners that have collaborated with us.

Accordingly, a collaborative group of Sun Prairie organizations and leaders are taking a step towards building a collective vision and a long-term, city-wide strategy that reflects cross-sector alignment for racial healing and transformation in Sun Prairie.

The first step in this process is to build space for conversation among community members to share their lived experiences, their hopes and dreams for what racial equity and justice looks like to them in our community. We recognize that the diverse groups that live, work, and play in Sun Prairie have different and unique lived experiences and needs. It is our desire to provide dedicated spaces to promote greater communication and belonging in specific groups and collectively in a multicultural group. Community members are invited to participate in both intraracial and interracial conversations.

It is also worth noting that the affinity group structure that has been established for the purpose of obtaining community feedback is hardly novel or controversial. Indeed, many of America's leading corporations (e.g. Northwestern Mutual, PNC Bank, U.S. Bank, Bank of America, and AT&T) utilize affinity groups within their organizations to promote greater communication and belonging amongst their diverse workforce. We are confident that the use of affinity groups in connection with the work being done by Courageous Conversation Global Foundation will prove to be similarly productive.

Following the intraracial and interracial conversations, a **2-day *Courageous Conversation: The Experience*** workshop is provided for up to 80 community members to equip themselves with tools to serve as effective catalysts for racial justice and racial healing. This is a multiracial learning space. Community members do not need to attend a Community Conversation in order to participate in the training. There is no fee for this workshop. All programs will be held virtually [via Zoom](#).

Lastly, Global Foundation staff will meet with the Key Strategy Partners to collectively identify the first steps in a long-term, city-wide strategy that reflects what was learned in all of the Community Conversations and the workshop. Accordingly, a collaborative group of Sun Prairie organizations and leaders are taking a step towards building a collective vision that reflects cross-sector alignment for racial healing and transformation in Sun Prairie.

The Key Strategy Partners reflect a diverse, cross-sector group of community leaders including Sun Prairie Community Schools, Sun Prairie Area School District, City of Sun Prairie (Neighborhood Navigators & the City Administrator's office), the Sun Prairie High School Black Student Union, African American Parent Network, Boys & Girls Club, Sun Prairie Public Library, and Prairie Music & Arts in partnership with the Courageous Conversation Global Foundation.

We will continue to share, invite, and work with our community members on what was learned and what actions we will take in response to what was shared.

To restate from above, it is our purpose to live out our values in order to make Sun Prairie be a warm and vibrant community where all are welcome and feel safe. Our ultimate goal is to create safe and welcoming spaces to address our most significant issues of bias and inequity both in our organizations and community. We accept our responsibility to ensure that all children, all families, and all community members are well served and we are fully committed to meeting their needs. We believe this is our collective responsibility and will continue to implement strategies to engage our diverse community.

With respect,

Dr. Brad Saron, SPASD Superintendent
Aaron Oppenheimer, City Administrator
Jamie Racine, Community Schools Program Coordinator

Statements of Support from our Key Strategy Partners

"We have seen systemic racism not just in our schools but in our community as recent as February 1, 2021. After this racial incident, AAPN drafted a demand letter to the Sun Prairie Area School district, in closing we wrote: "When It comes to equity work, It's everybody's work...." We stand by these words with partnership in these conversations. The Racial affinity groups happening during these conversations allow safe places for honest and open conversation for people who have experienced racial trauma in our community. In these groups there are no minorities, because everybody present will identify racially with every voice at the table. We support these community conversations as a first step in healing and recognize that as a community equity is everyone's work."

~African American Parent Network

"Per the event listing, the City of Sun Prairie and Sun Prairie Community Schools are organizing intra- and inter-racial conversations as a part of racial healing and understanding. Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County encourages efforts to support racial equity and the creation of safe spaces for everyone to engage in conversations about race to inspire change."

~Boys & Girls Club

"The YMCA is honored to be a part of the *Community Conversations* initiative in Sun Prairie. As an integral service provider within Sun Prairie, we look forward to being a participant and will follow their lead for the process through which discovery will be made. We are focused on the outcome of the process so that we can fully understand the needs of the community in order to deliver the most impactful programs. The Y functions similarly with its staff, utilizing a Community of Color Employee Resource Group to make sure that the voices of our staff of color are heard and represented in the decisions we make."

~YMCA of Dane County President and CEO Mark Westover

“Prairie Music & Arts is a committed partner in the community conversation regarding race and equity in the City of Sun Prairie. We believe strongly in being a vocal advocate for disadvantaged youth and families and are proud to be participating in the Global Foundations programs to develop strategies for racial healing.”

~ Prairie Music & Arts