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June 15, 2020

Dear City Council and Mill Valley Community,

We as a School Board and School District stand with the Black Lives Matter movement and recognize that we have a long way to go as a society to achieve racial equality. This statement includes the message that went out to our school community on June 8th as well as some additional thoughts including an update on our discussion during our June 10th board meeting and a specific reply to a query regarding the potential merger of the Mill Valley and Sausalito-Marin City School Districts.

Recent events have put a spotlight on the fact that while we are all living through this global pandemic, our communities of color continue to face inherent and persistent racism, both evidenced by the recent troubling and unjust events as well as the disproportionate impact of COVID-19. We as a district stand in solidarity with those standing against the needless and tragic deaths of men like Amhaud Arbery and George Floyd and believe this is a time for reflection, conversation, and action.

Teaching even our youngest children to recognize racism in its many forms is incumbent upon all of us in our educational community. Being prepared to do this starts with reflection—reflection about structural racism, about our part in perpetuating it, and about how to have age-appropriate conversations, both at home and in school.

Those conversations are more crucial than ever during this uncertain and scary time. It is important that our children understand not only the systematic racism that led to the deaths of Breonna Taylor, Amhaud Arbery, and George Floyd, but also the inequities that racism has perpetuated as an undercurrent in our society.

And finally, we must collectively and as a district take action. Depending on the age of your child, action will look differently, but at the very least, we all must all act together to stand up to racism and injustice. While our anti-racism and anti-bias professional development have been underway for some time as part of the focus on equity in our strategic plan, we must approach them with more intentionality and make sure that the work doesn't stay in the theoretical, but instead translates to our daily lives and the school day. Only then will we ensure that our students and staff of color not only feel safe, but also have their voices heard. Together, we can act equitably in an effort to dismantle racial biases in our homes and community.

At our board meeting on June 10, we continued the conversation with an acknowledgement that we as a district have work ahead of us to undue systemic racism in our district. We called out our achievement gap and presented the outline of a plan to address this systemic racism and teach all of our students to be anti-racist.

We will start by:

- Acknowledging systemic racism
- Convening a committee and creating a plan
- Implementing and monitoring our plan
- Holding people accountable

In order to do this well, we will:

- Examine our core and intervention practices
- Analyze and monitor data for our students
- Increase instructional capacity through curricular alignment, professional development, collaboration, and data driven reflection on practices
- Examine our culturally responsive practices

Finally, we would like to touch on the exploration of a merger with the Sausalito-Marin City School District as there have been misstatements in the press regarding why a merger between the two districts wasn't further pursued past the initial Feasibility Consolidation Study requested by the Marin County Office of Education. As a board, we did not want to press pause. On the contrary, when the feasibility consultant said we should "press pause", we as a board directed our interim superintendent to continue to engage in opportunities to collaborate.

Our board stands ready to collaborate and share resources with the Sausalito-Marin City School District as well as Bolinas-Stinson and Tam Union. We believe that working together will provide better outcomes for all children and we are open to the idea of exploring a merger, with the understanding that the ultimate decision lies with voters in each school district. We know that we stand with our local districts in working towards equitable educational outcomes for all students and want to particularly acknowledge the work that is being done to desegregate the Sausalito-Marin City School District and to explore a one-school model.

We bear tremendous responsibility as educators and are ready to be part of dismantling systemic and institutional racism in our schools, our town, and our county.

Dr. Kimberly Berman, Superintendent

Marco Pardi, Board President

Emily Uhlhorn, Trustee

Todd May, Trustee

Leslie Wachtel, Trustee

Bob Jacobs, Trustee