

August 20, 2020

Dear Bolling Colleagues:

We are living through a pivotal moment for the Boston Public Schools community and its students. As the world responds to the world-changing impact of COVID-19 and the public murders of Black peoples, the descendants of African enslaved groups in the US and the Black/Brown diaspora continue to struggle daily to live in the turmoil of the American racist system. Not only is the impact of this system relived daily by the students and families we serve, but it also dwells within our spirit, your colleagues, “here” in the Bolling Building.

Our pain is perpetuated by those that struggle to acknowledge the truth of the moment. It is often difficult to find the courage and conviction to express our unease. And so, to make our feelings plain to you, our colleagues:

- We are tired.
- We often wear a mask of [double-consciousness](#) that is heavy.
- We are overwhelmed by being silenced as our stories are often co-opted.
- We carry the weight and fatigue of having our lives and contributions to BPS bartered or sidelined.
- We are disgusted as we watch Black/Brown children used as pawns in career-building opportunities for those who seek another bullet on their resume but are never fully implementing the changes that are sold to the community.<sup>1</sup>

After processing the statements of support provided by BPS colleagues, we were left with conflicting feelings of hope and unease. Although these responses have been written to display solidarity with the current situation, the conversations and actions that bring about lasting change and true solidarity have not yet taken place.

Many of the microaggressions that have been suffered within the halls of BPS and Central Office have yet to be acknowledged ([link to reading](#)). These acts, such as the questioning of intelligence and skills of Black/Brown staff in BPS; retaliatory practices of being denied promotions or access to decision-making opportunities when issues of injustice and bias are identified; and hiring practices that are skewed to candidates who have relationships with leaders to the detriment of a diverse applicant pool **are indicators of racist practices that are tolerated at Bolling which continue to perpetuate the inequalities endured by Black/Brown staff**. Even more so, these practices are magnified at the school and community level because they are tolerated at Bolling.

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<sup>1</sup> [DESE Audit](#), March 13, 2020- pg 5 “ Across the district, in schools, in classrooms, and in the daily learning experiences of students and the teaching practice of teachers, the vision and ideas of central leaders often fail to gain traction, and the initiatives of educators in schools are insufficiently supported by the system as a whole.



As the decision-making and operationalizing body for the District, we must address how past decisions have perpetuated disparities for students of color. For example, decisions made at Bolling regarding [student assignment](#) practices, school-based autonomy for [disciplining students](#)<sup>2</sup>, the lack of monitoring of how Black/Brown boys are [assigned](#) and kept in special education are all results of decisions made at Bolling without taking into account the recommendations and feedback of Black/Brown Central Office staff who have been marginalized, ostracised or outright fired in the process of advocating for change. Colleagues have identified that there is a need to *“ensure that every significant Boston Public Schools decision we make, whether a change in policy, program, curriculum, or strategy, be subject to an immediate and comprehensive racial equity analysis through the use of the BPS Racial Equity Planning Tool, and modified according to the insights generated by its application.”*<sup>3</sup> Yet, there have been instances where the Racial Equity Tool has been used as a weapon against the needs of Black/Brown students. For example, school leaders submitting the rationale that they used the equity tool as a decision tool to recommend the dismantling of services for English Learners or denying access to racial-minority groups to their school. There is a myriad of additional observable instances where decisions were made or actions were taken to further the marginalization of Black/Brown colleagues at Bolling and policies were implemented that perpetuated the current system of inequity for our families and children.

The strategic plan provides great aspirational goals for changing the outcomes for the marginalized groups in BPS, yet we know that these goals are not necessarily new. As members of the community represented in published reports on how the systems in BPS continue to fail Black/Brown communities<sup>45</sup>, many of us have also shared testimonials on the actual bottlenecks in the system that hinder real change. For example, the perpetuation of over-representation of Black/Brown students in special education is both an intentional structure and an outcome of racist ideologies in BPS. BPS colleagues have made recommendations that we track both schools and those who are making these recommendations in order to qualify where instances of bias and outright racist practices are prevailing. To date, there has not been a sharing out of this type of accountability to change operational practices here at Bolling.

As a result of noting racist practices such as those outlined above, reviewing the statements from Bolling allies, and in alignment with the district’s theory of racial equity, we offer the following recommendations:

1. We propose that all district policies are compiled, reviewed, and updated to reflect both the BPS strategic plan’s 6 Commitments and the Superintendent’s commitment to being an anti-racist school district. This process should be conducted by a review committee reflective of impacted stakeholders. We recommend the purpose of this committee is to:

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<sup>2</sup> From internal data review for SY19-20 data where it showed 89% of students who were suspended were Black/Brown students.

<sup>3</sup> [APIDA statement](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Opportunity and Equity: Enrollment and Outcomes of Black and Latino Males in Boston Public Schools](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Boston’s Declining Child Population and Its Effect on School Enrollment](#)

- a. Establishing a cross-functional team that represents Black/Brown Bolling staff, School Committee members, EL-Task Force representatives, OG-Task Force representatives, families, and students who will spend the upcoming year auditing and providing recommendations for the district to update said policies.
  - b. Clarifying the role of the Office of Equity to be a true monitor and accountability agent of these policies and to hold the line moving forward to ensure that all district policies promote anti-racist practices.
  - c. Leverage current data systems and invest in building dashboards that are usable, accessible, and coherent to drive anti-racist policies. Due to various levels of autonomy provided to schools, data that would support levels of accountability to monitor how students and families are being serviced are fragmented. In the creation of these data platforms, there should be a clear decision-making process to implement changes based on the findings of this information.
2. We also propose that the review of submissions of the district’s equity tool be transparent and reported out at least on a quarterly basis. There is also a need to change the make-up of those at the table who review and audit these submissions to identify if the tool was used effectively.
- a. Example: Though the district has commitments, policies, research was about the need for diversity in hiring for school-based staff, the lack of accountability for school leaders to make this a reality is symptomatic of the issue of lack of accountability at Bolling when the implementation of these policies are not truly reviewed, but provided a cursory report.
3. Rather than individual group statements, we desire that all employees of BPS generate one statement that comes out of true commitment concerning the issues that our families and students are facing. We are in agreement that we need to have ***brave conversations with colleagues*** and ***interrupt the use of racist language and incidents of overt and covert racist behavior***<sup>6</sup>, but in order for this to be powerful you have to:
- a. Engage in the difficult conversation with Black/Brown colleagues who can help you see and understand how overt and covert behaviors have created additional trauma in the workplace and perpetuate inequities for staff, families, and students of color.
  - b. Desire and be willing to enact true change which may result in shifts in leadership/power dynamics in BPS.
  - c. Participate in professional learning experiences that promote antiracist practices to better empathize with the challenges that we, your colleagues, endure.

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<sup>6</sup> [White Bolling Message to the BPS Central Office Community](#)



4. We hope that by the end of the process that an accountability group is established made up of staff in order to:
  - a. Examine, through an anti-racist lens, BPS policies that prevent Bolling staff members from thriving and being acknowledged for their contribution to BPS.
  - b. Advocate for policies that would promote equity and fairness in how positions are created, staffed, and supervised at Bolling.
  - c. Hold ourselves and others accountable in ensuring that Black/Brown voices are elevated during meetings and in decision making and establish systems to track the outcomes of these decisions.

As this work is being outlined, it requires commitment and consistency in its implementation in order to engage in authentic, real-time dialogue. It took decades for BPS to reinforce the structure that perpetuates these inequities both at the Central Office and at the school level. While we understand it will take time to peel back the layers to reveal the underpinning policies that need to be changed and to establish new roots that promote justice and equity for all, we hope you take the time to review this letter and the references provided. We have an opportunity to stand together during this time of unprecedented changes and choose a course of action that will improve the life outcomes of children who have dreams and goals but who are waiting for their schools to be more fair, equitable, and responsive to their needs. But, first, we must face these structural challenges in front of us as one body in the Central Office.

We look forward to engaging in this difficult, uncomfortable but necessary conversation with you in the upcoming months. A meeting invite will be sent for the end of September/beginning of October where we hope to come together to begin our dialogue for healing and to set action steps to bring about needed changes. Until we deal with the underlying issues that perpetuate the current power structure at Bolling, BPS schools will never see real change in closing the opportunity gap and changing the narrative of racist ideologies that underpin the White supremacist notions that have permeated BPS since Judge Garrity's order for school desegregation.

Signed,

Boston Public Schools Black/Brown Affinity Group at the Bruce C. Bolling Building

*The Black/Brown Staff at Bolling have made a conscious decision to not sign our individual names due to past experiences with and fear of retaliation by those in leadership positions in both Boston Public Schools and the City of Boston.*

