

## **A MESSAGE FROM COLCHESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**COLCHESTER – Tuesday, February 15, 2022** – Colchester Public Schools recognizes that racism exists. Colchester Public Schools does not condone, nor tolerate racism in any form. Moreover, we acknowledge that the incident that occurred at Ledyard High School after the girls' basketball game on February 5th, 2022 has caused a great deal of harm to the students, families and members of both communities. We also acknowledge that incidents such as these can trigger members of our community, specifically our Black students and families who may experience these events as a continual source of trauma. As a result of the accusations surrounding the incident, our basketball players and their families have experienced harm caused by social media attacks and threats to their livelihoods. Our community has experienced harm caused by accusations of widespread racism and a growing public perception that Colchester is inherently a racist community.

### **Other Allegations**

When our district receives a report or allegation of discrimination, we take these reports very seriously, including conducting a full investigation in accordance with our Board of Education policy and regulation. We are hopeful that Ledyard will do the same in this situation, and we await the results of their formal investigation. Since February 5th, a number of concerns beyond the initial complaint have been raised in the news and on social media. We encourage anyone who has additional information or would like to make a complaint to do so with the school administration. The administration has conducted preliminary investigations into each of the following concerns:

- Our administration has received one formal complaint that we are actively investigating in accordance with our board's Non-discrimination Policy and procedures.
- There is no evidence that any member of the Bacon Academy girls basketball team, nor any member of its coaching staff, made any racist comments before, during, or after the game.
- There is no evidence that any person made any racist comments during the basketball game. The comment on the video that can be heard during the game may sound like a racial slur, but the lack of any response at that moment by anyone in the Gymnasium leads us to believe that is not what was actually said in real-time.
- There is no evidence that the Bacon Academy fan section made monkey noises during the basketball game between the two teams at Bacon Academy on December 21st. There is video of the game and there is no occurrence of that behavior on the videotape. Bacon Academy staff were present to supervise the game and have confirmed that Bacon Academy fans were appropriate. We will continue to work with our Bacon Academy spectators to remain polite and respectful of athletes and other spectators.

### **Action Steps to Address the Harm Done to Our Community**

The first step is for individuals to take responsibility and stop harassment of anyone in our community. As a community, we must fight back against racism and racist events through

education, actions in support of those who are harmed, and to promote understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Diversity, equity, and inclusion work is long-term and takes concerted effort by all, and our district is committed to the goal of providing our students and families with a community that is increasingly free from racism. Although this work will take time, some of our immediate action steps to support those who have been harmed by these recent events are included in this letter. We are actively working with our partner, the National Conference for Community & Justice (NCCJ), and have consulted with them for their expertise and advice on how to accelerate our plans to move forward as a school community. Family-school-community partnerships are a shared responsibility and it is imperative that we surround our students with kindness and compassion through a community of support.

**By the end of this week:**

- Schedule counseling opportunities for our BIPOC students to process their feelings regarding recent events, provided by the staff at NCCJ to occur by the end of next week
- Announcement to all students and families triggered by this event that they may receive supportive services (e.g., counseling)
- Reinforcement of the athletic code of conduct for spectating and participation at all athletic events

**By March 1st:**

- Establish a coalition of student groups (e.g., Diversity Club/GSA/BA Ambassadors) to identify needs and potential next steps for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion work
- Identify 25 Bacon Academy students representing various backgrounds to participate in NCCJ's "Bridges" training
- Schedule a training to occur by the end of the school year for staff at Bacon Academy in bias awareness provided by NCCJ

**By April 1st:**

- Provide a refresh of training to students/teachers/families in the bullying and harassment policy and how to make reports of possible bullying and harassment
- Provide coverage for the members of the District DEI Committee to accelerate our long-term action planning

**In Partnership,  
Jeffrey E. Burt - Superintendent**