



Friends for Equity  
in Avon Schools

CONNECTING. BELONGING. THRIVING.

February 6, 2022

Avon Board of Education  
Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Superintendent  
Avon Public Schools Teachers and Staff  
34 Simsbury Rd  
Avon, CT 06001

**RE: Message of Community Support for Avon Public Schools' Teachers, Staff, and Leadership**

Dear APS Teachers, Staff, and Leadership,

This letter comes to you from *Friends for Equity in Avon Schools*, our members, and supporters. Established in the summer of 2020, Friends for Equity in Avon Schools is a group of Avon parents and residents advocating for an inclusive school culture that welcomes diversity and values racial equity through connection, education, and community collaboration.

The past two years have been difficult for teachers, school staff, and leadership due to the pandemic and the vitriol directed at educators we've seen locally and nationally. We sincerely thank you for the incredible job everyone at APS has done to support our students and address these challenges with professionalism, resilience, and grace. There is no job more important than this and we are grateful for your tireless efforts and dedication. You are building the skills, abilities, and talents of the next generation.

As parents and community members, we have witnessed a growing wave of dangerous rhetoric sweep across the country. This organized agenda is aimed at censoring history curricula and banning literature, music, and art. The common thread in these efforts is a bold and ugly push to silence marginalized voices and narratives and to discourage any discussion of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Sadly, this disturbing movement has come to Avon. This is alarming for many reasons. For teachers, the threat of parents trolling for "CRT" red flags creates low morale and may cause teachers to refrain from covering content and classroom discussions that encourage critical thinking, thereby impacting the quality of our children's education and personal growth. This also creates a less attractive district when it comes to recruiting and retaining diverse teachers that will bring different perspectives and provide needed role models for all of our students.

As parents and community members we want to make it unequivocally clear that we support and encourage the APS community to (age appropriately) do the following:

- **Support qualified, experienced teachers in being allowed to do their jobs without doubting or questioning their professionalism or work**
- **Ensure targeted books remain in the school libraries and curricula to protect and support intellectual freedom and not succumb to censorship attempts**
- **Teach complete US and world history, civil rights, genocide, and Black and Latino studies**
- **Encourage teachers to lead thoughtful socratic discussions of controversial/sensitive topics, including the ones above, without fear of questioning or retribution**
- **Ensure accessibility of diverse representation and narratives in literature, art, and music**
- **Train teachers to appropriately have and teach the hard conversations**

Why is this so important?

Our community continues to become more diverse. As of 2020, 24% of Avon's population is BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), with an even higher and growing percentage of BIPOC students in the school system, especially in the lower grades. This includes recent growth within our southeast Asian, Asian, Hispanic and Jamaican communities<sup>1</sup>. Similar to state and national trends, the Avon community will continue to diversify. Avon students who reside in Hartford also attend APS through the Open Choice Program, with participation likely to increase under the recent Sheff vs. O'Neill ruling<sup>2</sup>.

We know from studies of child psychology, early childhood education, and other disciplines that all children benefit from diverse learning environments where different races, cultures, income levels, abilities, and talents come together. The Century Foundation details why and how in this article titled: [\*The Benefits of Socioeconomically and Racially Integrated Schools and Classrooms\*](#)<sup>3</sup>.

- **Diverse classrooms encourage critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity.** We know that diverse classrooms, in which students learn cooperatively alongside those whose perspectives and backgrounds are different from their own, are [beneficial to all students](#)—including middle-class white students—because these environments promote creativity, motivation, deeper learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.<sup>10</sup>
- **Learning in integrated settings can enhance students' leadership skills.** A longitudinal study of college students found that the more often first-year students were exposed to diverse educational settings, [the more their leadership skills improved](#).<sup>14</sup>
- **Meaningful relationships between individuals with different racial or ethnic backgrounds impacts how people treat racial and ethnic groups.** Studies show that emotional bonds formed through close cross-group relationships lead people to treat members of their friends' groups as

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<sup>1</sup> Avon 2021 Equity Profile published by Data Haven: [https://www.ctdatahaven.org/sites/ctdatahaven/files/avon\\_profile\\_v1.pdf](https://www.ctdatahaven.org/sites/ctdatahaven/files/avon_profile_v1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-news-sheff-desegregation-expansion-hartford-magnet-20200110-7hpmkplwxi-fxjedqu2r5bic44y-story.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://tcf.org/content/facts/the-benefits-of-socioeconomically-and-racially-integrated-schools-and-classrooms/>

well as they treat members of their own groups. These types of relationships are most commonly formed within schools that have greater levels of racial and ethnic diversity.<sup>15</sup>

- **Diverse classrooms prepare students to succeed in a global economy.** In higher education, university officials and business leaders argue that diverse college campuses and classrooms prepare students for life, work, and leadership in a more global economy by fostering leaders who are creative, collaborative, and able to navigate deftly in dynamic, multicultural environments.<sup>20</sup>

The Avon residents named below support this message and encourage APS teachers, staff, and leadership to continue building an education system and community that appropriately serves every student as you prepare our children for the local and global challenges they will eventually face in a rapidly evolving and diversifying world. We especially thank and support APS teachers for the invaluable work you all do.

Sincerely,

Kim Stevenson



Chris Campbell



Annie Simpson



Carrie Firestone



Nakisha Smith



Jaime Polhamus



Julie McNeill

