

11/16/21

Joint Statement from the Danvers School Committee and Superintendent regarding the November 15, 2021 executive session.

We can confirm that at this meeting, no motions were made nor were votes taken and that the superintendent's employment status with the district remains unchanged. Although we cannot release the specifics discussed during the Executive Session, the Committee and the Superintendent agreed that our discussion was positive, and we all agree on the importance of moving forward together and to ensure the district lives our values.

We have reflected upon the events of the past year, including the conflict between the public's desire for as much transparency as possible in everything that we do, and our obligation to uphold the legal rights to individual privacy of our students and staff, which require that certain information remain confidential. In order to meet these legal obligations, the investigatory reports that we furnished to the public were redacted to protect the identities of these individuals or would lead to the identity of students. We cannot make public any consequential action taken with regard to employees or students. As such matters fall squarely within statutory privacy laws it is not appropriate to comment further on these. Be assured that the Danvers Public Schools administration took prompt action in response to the allegations including reporting to law enforcement agencies and the Department of Children and Families, as well as conducting an internal investigation and hiring an independent investigator to conduct an investigation.

We applaud the young person who courageously came forward to shine a light on what is alleged to have occurred and hope he knows that his actions will lead to change. We also recognize that our community has been traumatized. We regret that our communication to the public, upon the conclusion of the investigations, fell short in terms of emphasizing the seriousness of what occurred and the District's response, causing concern and dismay regarding a very serious set of incidents of racism, homophobia, and bullying.

While the administration and School Committee openly discussed this topic at many School Committee meetings, a thoughtful and conscious decision was made to withhold specific details of the investigation to protect the students involved. We are committed to doing better in the future in our timely and responsive communications to our school community, while also upholding the rights of privacy to which individuals are legally entitled. Our two new School Committee members, who were not part of these discussions as Committee members at the time, have added an eye-opening perspective on the crucial need for transparency and our collective efforts going forward.

We have all learned that as a school district, we must redouble our efforts to do all that we can from an educational standpoint to establish a culture where our students and our staff know that acts of racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, bullying or conduct which in any way defines people other than by their character, simply has no place in our schools. While these issues are being felt in many other communities, we must do better here in Danvers. We will be identifying specific actions that we can take toward that end; we seek the community's help in suggesting resources to help us on this journey. We will be reviewing our policies, our programs, and seeking outside consultation to help us.

Issues such as we face in our schools are community issues as well. We hope and believe that the citizens of Danvers are committed to addressing issues of racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, or religious differences in ways that lead us to a better place.