



MEMORANDUM

from Lee Ann Dickinson-Kelley
Administrator for Elementary Education

Editor's note: AnnArbor.com removed the name of a student referenced in this report to protect his privacy.

July 19, 2010

This document summarizes the findings following the series of events leading up to, during, and following the Dicken School "Lunch Group Field Trip for African American Students" as investigated by the Administrator for Elementary Education.

Background Information

In the fall of 2009, discussions occurred between Principal, Michael Madison, and his staff, members of the Equity Team, members of the School Improvement Team, and members of the Parent/ Teacher/Organization regarding the achievement discrepancies between Caucasian students and African American students at Dicken Elementary School. Suggested interventions were generated during these various conversations, which included convening a lunchtime support group, which would be sponsored by 4 members of the Equity team. This lunch group met weekly since January of 2010 and was comprised of African American students in third-fifth grades. The boys met separately from the girls. The purpose of the group was intended to provide a safe environment for African American students to discuss issues impacting achievement and personal efficacy with trusted adult staff members. The constellation of the student group was exclusively African American.

On April 28th, thirty African American students went on a field trip to visit Dr. Gallimore, a renowned scientist in space exploration at the University of Michigan who is himself African American. Mr. Madison scheduled this event following a meeting with Dr. Gallimore, during which Dr. Gallimore expressed concern that more African American students were not pursuing science as a field of study.

When the students returned to school from the field trip and entered their vocal music class "booing" ensued by some students who did not participate in the field trip event.

Mr. Madison reprimanded the students in Mr. Monash's fifth grade classroom the following day for the booing behavior. A discussion followed between Mr. Madison and the fifth grade students regarding racial bias and societal injustice, Mr. Madison's personal experiences of racial profiling, and discriminatory behaviors such as booing. Students became upset and reported these events/ discussion to their parents.

The field trip and ensuing events attracted great local, state-wide and national concern and attention. The Ann Arbor Board of Education subsequently apologized to the community and public at large for the activities of Dicken School and promised to take immediate corrective action. While the District's commitment to equity and eliminating all Achievement Gaps remains the highest priority, the District fully recognizes the boundaries of the law and expects its leadership staff to do the same.

Compensatory activities were implemented before the end of the school year to include large and small community meetings, discontinuation of the lunch bunch group, responding to public inquires and instructing all administrators to correctly follow public policy and constitutional expectation. Community resources from the University of Michigan will be sought to support ongoing conversation about race and achievement issues with parents and students throughout the 2010-11 school year.

Findings

While there is no evidence to suggest that Mr. Madison knowingly and intentionally violated the District's Non discrimination Policy #2050 and Article I, Section 26 of the State Constitution, his actions did indeed do so. There is some evidence to suggest that members of his school improvement team, colleagues and members of the PTO raised initial concerns about the propriety of the group's exclusivity. After internal discussions within Dicken a decision was made to move forward. Mr. Madison should have investigated these cautions and concerns further. The district expects its educational leaders to demonstrate greater regard for public policy and to initiate professional inquiry when there is any doubt or question about permissibility in these areas.

Following the field trip that occurred on April 28th, Mr. Madison reprimanded the students in Mr. Monash's class for the reported booing as reported to Mr. Madison by the music teacher. There is some question whether the booing was the manifestation of student envy, racial bias towards the African American students who participated in the field trip, concern by the students that the music class was again crowded with the increased number of students returning from the trips and/or because this class has in the past "booed" as a demonstration of displeasure. Regardless, the students interpreted the booing behavior and Mr. Madison as a slight towards African American students by their Caucasian peers.

Mr. Madison engaged the students in what he characterized as a "courageous" conversation about race and racial profiling. This exchange caused some students to become upset with other students while others felt the conversation was personally accusatory. Mr. Madison's tone was described as passionate and intense by some and as yelling by others. Some students became clearly upset—crying-- and felt singled out. Mr. Madison sought out the school psychologist following the conversation to help calm individual classmates.

Again, principals as educational leaders are expected to lead by example; at no time should any teacher or principal engage students in an extended conversation by yelling or with an intimidating tone. Furthermore, while discussions about culture and race can be very healthy and lead to a greater sense of understanding and tolerance, the students in Mr. Monash's classroom were unprepared for such an intense and intensely personal conversation given the context of the "field trip" events. Mr. Madison should have used better professional judgment and engaged in a developmentally appropriate conversation with the fifth grade students without the context of anger and personal references.

Mr. Madison singled out student, (retracted) on April 29th by removing him from the classroom to the hallway and outside the outer school doors to discuss his participation in

the boeing incident. Mr. Madison explained that he wanted to insure privacy for (the student) since the classroom door across the hallway was open. It was a demonstration of poor judgment to remove a student outside the outer school doors to engage in such a conversation when remaining inside the school and closing the opposite classroom door would have resulted in the desired privacy. Removing the student outside the outer doors caused the student and student's parents grave concern. Upon hindsight, Mr. Madison agrees he should have taken (the student) to his [Mr. Madison's] office for this discussion, which would have been consistent with administrative practice.

In closing, it is expected that Mr. Madison appreciate the degree to which his actions exposed the school district to potential illegalities, diverted precious district resources— personnel and community goodwill---during the last critical month of the school year, exposed the school district to local, national and international criticism, focused undeserved scrutiny of the Pacific Group's Educational Program, and impacted Dicken School families, staff and students. It is expected that no such actions or lack of judgment will occur again. It is expected that Mr. Madison will seek out counsel from his immediate supervisor should he have any question in the future during his administrative tenure about the propriety of any administrative decision. Mr. Madison should take appropriate and immediate steps to be more familiar with Board policies and Constitutional guidelines that govern administrative actions at the school level and impact all residents at the State level. And while racial injustice remains a pernicious and nefarious assault on our society, a condition that impacts the lives of students every day, the degree to which we directly involve our youngest students in these conversations must be done with regard for developmental readiness and with great care. Mr. Madison's desire to address the achievement gap at Dicken School is commended; the manner in which he went about doing so with respect to configuring the lunch group and subsequent field trip was not appropriate. Such decision-making was not responsible and should not be repeated.