



Our mission: To embody mercy, justice, and love as
diverse faith partners in Washington County

www.harccoalition.org

January 31, 2025

Superintendent Dr. David Sovine and
The Board of Education of
Washington County Public Schools

Re: Request to reconsider the Supervisor of Equity and Excellence position and change in meeting time

Dear Dr. Sovine and Board of Education Members,

HARC and our partner congregations are blessed to partner with Washington County Public Schools in various ways to support students (Micah's Backpack, the Lighthouse After-School Program, etc.). We appreciate your openness to a community-in-schools approach and believe that partnership and collaboration make our schools and community stronger. We know the BOE and staff of WCPS work hard to ensure children in Washington County receive the best education, and we know you continually strive to build a more equitable system to serve all students. We want to support you in that effort in any way we can. And we also believe we have an obligation to speak up when that equitable system is at risk.

First, we ask that the time of the Board of Education public meetings be moved back to 6:00 to allow for public participation. The move to 4:00 was made without public input, and we have heard an outcry from our constituents and partners that the new time prevents many of them from attending the meetings due to work obligations during the day, even with the time for comments set at 5:00. Parents and students will also have difficulty attending. As an elected board, the Board of Education has an obligation to remain accessible to the public, which means welcoming in-person input.

Second, we understand that with the FY26 budget, the position of Supervisor of Equity and Excellence is slated to be eliminated. This would be of great detriment to our school system and our community – our board shared the same concern last year when the cut was under consideration. While it may seem like a cost savings in a lean budget, in reality it will create a greater cost to children, teachers and school administrators who will go unsupported in a time when our population is rapidly growing in diversity and increasing in poverty. When 221 more students qualify for free and reduced meals (the number was already more than 60%) and 172 more students are multilingual learners, we need more staff focused on equity, not fewer – certainly not *none*.

Equity is about access to opportunities for ALL students, which sometimes means making accommodations to help those who can't otherwise participate, or fostering understanding among staff and other students to improve relationships and create a better learning environment for all. It's also about listening to teachers and other staff and offering support, advocacy and connections, ultimately making for a better work environment and supporting retention efforts. In a time when recruitment is difficult and there is competition among school systems, we can't afford to lose good teachers. We also can't afford to leave any child behind.

It is difficult to measure prevention. How many teachers, when experiencing racism or culture shock, might have left their jobs in favor of another school district had the WCPS Supervisor of Equity and Excellence not listened to them, helped them navigate our system, and shown that WCPS leadership cares? How many teachers and administrators might have made missteps (or worse) with students, parents or other staff were it not for training – and what headaches or litigation might those missteps have caused?

As faith leaders, we have heard the struggles of our constituents and their children. The struggles of Black teachers who feel alone among an all-white staff in their schools, the struggles of teachers of any race who feel like they have a "mini-United Nations" in their classroom and need guidance, the struggles of Muslim children whose customs are not understood by their peers or teachers, the struggles of children who have never had a teacher who looks like them, and of children who have not been offered the same opportunities as their peers or haven't been able to take advantage of opportunities because of barriers of access.

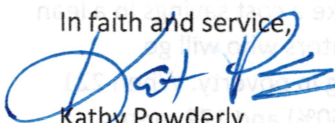
We believe strides have been made to combat these inequities and increase understanding in the last several years since the Supervisor of Equity and Excellence position was added. The Supervisor of Equity and Excellence has personally met with Muslim leaders and Black pastors and members of the Hispanic community to hear their concerns and learn more about their customs and needs to share with school administrators. She has listened to teachers and administrators and worked to address issues of inequity in our schools based on their concerns and needs. Who else will take on this responsibility if this position is eliminated? Simply dividing the work amongst already overburdened staff will not yield the results WCPS is committed to. Cultivating learning communities that spark curiosity, ignite creativity, and inspire success requires the support of everyone and an office that is focused on those goals specifically.

The Supervisor of Equity and Excellence is the only staff member in Washington County Public Schools charged with ensuring equity in our school system and fulfilling requirements of COMAR. No other staff members have the background or training to do this, and with the work load already carried by staff, we believe the work simply won't be done. This puts WCPS at risk for violation of COMAR requirements and loss of funding, our students at risk for poorer educational outcomes, and our teachers and administrators left on their own to navigate these challenges.

We ask you to reconsider including the position of Supervisor of Equity and Excellence in the FY26 budget to ensure teachers, administrators, and most especially our students all benefit from an equitable school system. As people of faith, we believe all people have equal value and are loved by God. This position helps ensure all at WCPS are treated as such. We also reiterate our request to move board meetings back to 6:00 to allow the public to participate in full recognition of their civic rights.

Thank you again for all you do to ensure children in Washington County receive an excellent and equitable education!

In faith and service,



Kathy Powderly
Executive Director



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Rev. Dionne Hall

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We believe in nurturing the unlimited potential of every child.

We believe all people have equal value and are loved by God.