

November 20, 2020

Petition to San Ramon Valley Unified School District Board of Education

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On June 29, 2020—as protests roiled the nation and our local community following the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor—the SRVUSD Board of Education passed [Resolution No. 95/19-20](#), recognizing that people of color *in our school district* regularly experience “micro-aggressions, racial profiling, hate incidents, and racial bias.” The Board said that the District would “increase its efforts to provide a safe and welcoming school environment,” and that it would “actively engage in the challenging work of dismantling the problematic practices that are limiting the opportunities for our Black and Brown students” (emphasis added).

Now that the moment of mass protest has passed, we, the undersigned members of the SRVUSD community, present the Board with this petition, to 1) ensure that the Board follows through on its commitment to *increase* efforts to promote racial justice, and 2) ask the Board to broaden its notion of which “problematic practices” need to change. The Board acknowledged in the June 29 meeting that it is not enough to denounce and punish instances of outright hatred and harassment; our district and community should also root out all manifestations of systemic racism in our curriculum, methods, and administrative practices if we are to nurture the well-being of our students of color and the compassionate consciousness of white students.

Looking at recent [Board minutes](#), it does not seem that *any* effort has been made to follow through on the June resolution. While we understand that COVID-19 response has consumed much of the Board’s attention, we strongly believe that racial justice cannot wait. The Board’s June resolution acknowledges that the pandemic has taken an “inequitable and disproportionate” toll on people of color. Black and Brown people are more likely to fall ill and die due to the same systemic racism that still lurks in our district’s curriculum and practices. As we prepare our students to be the leaders of tomorrow, it is absolutely urgent that we teach them honestly and fairly, so that they don’t go on to unwittingly perpetuate harm. The district must also support and listen to students as active agents of change.

No one said this work would be easy. The Board, as well as District staff and community members, *must not* use the COVID-19 crisis as an excuse to avoid grappling with the parallel emergency that is American racism. To fulfill its previous commitments and the priorities outlined below, we call on the Board to allocate extra time, resources, and personnel as needed to address both crises in tandem.

We demand that the Board take the steps outlined in the following two pages:

1. **Conduct a thorough review of District standards and curriculum to increase the representation and perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, reducing the dominance of white and European authors, stories, and tellings of history.**
 - a. This review should focus on ensuring equitable content in English and history *as well as all other subjects*.
 - b. This review must consider the feasibility of permitting African, Asian, Latinx, Indigenous, and other non-Eurocentric history and literature classes to satisfy history and English requirements (i.e. not just European and “World” History).
 - c. Questions that will be explored: Are we teaching outdated, one-sided views of colonization and slavery in American history? Are Black, Indigenous, and other people of color being represented in subtly racist ways? Are the joys, triumphs, and successes of people of color being depicted in addition to their hardships? Are we celebrating people of color all year long, or just during the various “history months”?
2. **Educate students on racism, microaggressions, and racial/class privilege both in and outside of the classroom.**
 - a. Education may take the form of curriculum units, assemblies, educational posters and flyers, student-led campaigns, and any other creative approaches suggested by school staff, students, community members, and outside auditors.
 - b. Recognizing students as agents of change, district and school staff must solicit input from students on how to define “racism,” “microaggressions,” and “privilege,” and support the effort of student groups already doing this work.
3. **Hire and train more teachers, counselors, and admin of color, and provide training and support to retain existing staff of color, in order to raise the percentage of self-identified BIPOC district employees from 15% to 20% ([the national average](#)) by 2022.**
 - a. Once the target percentage is reached, it should be re-evaluated and increased in subsequent years.
 - b. To get there, we suggest expanding on [hiring and retention practices](#) already used in other school districts:
 - i. Underwrite the cost of teacher preparation through service scholarships or loan forgiveness. Provide ongoing professional learning opportunities.
 - ii. Involve current staff of color in the hiring process in meaningful ways.
 - iii. Ask HR to review interview protocols for possible implicit bias.
 - iv. Partner with local public universities and programs that recruit teacher candidates from non-white populations, such as Grow Your Own.
 - v. Offer comprehensive induction, preparation, and support resources for teachers of color in their first years of teaching..
 - vi. Offer teachers of color pathways to become administrators, such as by using Title II’s optional 3% leadership set-aside funds to invest in support training.
 - c. Beyond a diverse workforce, the Board should prioritize hiring/encouraging applicants of all races who are committed to anti-racist pedagogy.

- 4. Build on the work of the District Equity Group by funding bias training for all District and school staff as well as members of the SRVUSD Board of Education.**
 - a. The District previously contracted with the Pacific Educational Group and its Courageous Conversations program, but trainings were not mandatory. The Board or District should solicit feedback from district equity leaders, staff of color, and outside auditors, to determine if this is the right program to engage with again.
 - b. This time, the trainings *must be mandatory for all District and school employees*.
- 5. Make a practice of formally acknowledging the Indigenous (Ohlone/Miwok) histories of the lands on which our schools sit, as a regular part of both Board meetings and the schooldays for students of all grades.**
 - a. This is becoming an increasingly widespread practice for schools and governments in [Canada](#), [Australia](#), and the US, and our district should become a local leader.
 - b. A simplified guide for engaging this practice, written by an SRVUSD alum, can be found [here](#), with a more detailed guide (including customizable posters) [here](#).
 - c. Consider paying [Shuumi Land Tax](#) to support local Ohlone people's efforts to acquire land. The Ohlone own virtually no land in the entire Bay Area, while our district owns acres and acres of what was once their land.
- 6. Divert some or all of the money currently spent on police in our schools to counselors, social workers, and other support systems for students of color. Conduct a review of all school disciplinary practices that may discriminate against students of color.**
 - a. This review must seriously consider the possibility of entirely removing police from our schools (as the Oakland school board recently [voted unanimously](#) to do).
 - b. The review must also look at restorative and transformative justice programs, and find ways to implement such programs as a healthier way of dealing with student violations.
 - c. Schools must also institute mandatory consequences (not just punitive, but educational) for all acts of racism on our campuses, including wearing costumes that satirize or demean other cultures, such as faux "Native American" headdresses
- 7. Commit to taking action on at least half of the priorities outlined in this petition by the end of the 2020-2021 school year, and the rest by the end of the first semester of the following school year.**
 - a. Actions taken must result in full implementation of each priority in a timely manner.
 - b. If the Board refuses to implement any of these asks, it must write a formal statement explaining why it is unable or unwilling to do so, for each specific priority.
 - c. As it has done with COVID-19 response, the Board and/or District staff should provide updates at each Board Meeting on the actions it has taken for racial justice, and how these actions have been received by staff and community members of color.
 - d. The pandemic must not be used as an excuse to avoid addressing the crisis of racism.

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