

A Statement from the MTI Board of Directors Demanding the Reinstatement of Marlon Anderson and Review of the Districts Zero Tolerance Practice, October 21, 2019

MTI makes the following demands of the Madison Metropolitan School District administration and Board of Education:

- Immediately reinstate Marlon Anderson as a member of the West High staff.
- Review the current zero tolerance practice as it applies to staff members through a transparent and inclusive process that includes all stakeholders.
- Work in good faith through actions that uplift the voices of staff, students, and families of color instead of silencing them, intentionally or otherwise.
- Prioritize racial equity in our district by providing support for staff and a true partnership with MTI in lifting the voice of staff, especially staff of color, in this work.

MTI wholeheartedly believes that in order for all of our children, families, and educators to succeed as a community, we must be an anti-racist community of educators advocating for an anti-racist school system. This belief requires us to reflect on how we use our words, not only in service to members of our Union family, but in service to our children, families, and staff of color because harmful language disproportionately impacts our most marginalized members.

That said, we are also strongly opposed to the District's zero-tolerance, highly punitive approach to employees who say the word, regardless of context or circumstance. Facts matter, context matters. As a Union we are committed to looking for ways to address inequities that exist in our educational system that is based in white supremacy. Zero tolerance is not one of those ways.

This zero-tolerance, highly punitive, no exception policy has now led to the District's termination of a highly-regarded African-American employee who objected to having that hateful word thrown at him by a student, and then repeating the word back to the student in his objection. As a result, the decision to terminate Marlon's employment silences the voice and power of a black man and erases his positive impact on all of the children, staff, and families of the West High community. This is an injustice.

Terminating African-American employees while simultaneously advocating for the hiring of more employees of color does not help us address racial inequity. Applying zero-tolerance approaches to individuals being directly harmed does nothing to support the hiring and retention of staff of color. Staff of color need to be empowered to have the difficult and necessary conversations with students and staff regarding issues concerning race.

Two of the guiding principles of the Behavior Education Plan are "We believe in teaching and intervention over consequences and punishment" and "We support progressive discipline, not 'zero tolerance'". These principles should apply to everyone in our schools. Until that happens it will be even more challenging to make the progress we need to make in the critically important work around racial equity. The district cannot "fire its way" to an enlightened, anti-racist work force. Guidance, professional development, and expectations on how predominantly white staff interact with children and staff of color are necessary to mitigate traumatic racial harm. But these practices need to be paired with productive ways to address the harm that's centered around the voices of the harmed. In reality, a zero-tolerance approach directly undermines the belief that restorative justice can be transformative. A restorative approach builds a community that can engage in the difficult conversations and challenging work around truly changing our systems for the betterment of all. Restoring Marlon Anderson into his role is a positive step in that direction.