



Madison Teachers Inc. Anti-Racism Statement

June 7, 2020

As a people, we face two viruses -- one, the COVID-19 virus, infected our American society four months ago. The other, racism, infected our society over 400 years ago when the first twenty Africans were stolen from their homes and brought to this country. Both have been proven deadly and traumatic to all Americans, but disproportionately so to our Black community. And while we have been racing to find a vaccine and treatment for COVID-19, our historical response to racism is not to eradicate it, but to welcome it into our laws, our systems and structures, our very way of life to the point that it is not recognizable to even the most vigilant eye.

Our educational systems at the federal, state, and local levels are infected with this stubborn strain of white supremacy and anti-blackness. Madison Teachers Inc. is not immune to racism. As part of becoming a more anti-racist organization, we claim responsibility for the ways we have perpetuated racism in our time, in our spaces, and in our community. We continue to educate ourselves through personal and organizational reflection, reaching out to those we have harmed, and taking steps to eradicate racism in our systems and spaces. Admittedly, we are evolving, and have much to learn. And, we are listening. We are learning.

Over the past two weeks, our country has witnessed a resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in response to the continuance of murders of Black Americans at the hands of police officers (George Floyd and Breonna Taylor) as well as white Americans who felt the privilege of doing so believing that the law and structures of white supremacy would protect them (Arnaud Arbery). The destruction of Black lives has been systematic and intentional for four centuries in America. We have fought wars over our right to destroy Black lives. We have set up complex systems of laws and cultural norms to justify our right to destroy, exclude, dehumanize, and devalue Black and Brown lives. Despite repeated historic movements and legislation, we continue to enact the hidden systems of oppression within our systems of education, policing, healthcare, and so forth.

As a union of educators, as a union of human beings believing our purpose is to uplift the lives of all children, we must make changes that actually reflect our desired goal of becoming an anti-racist organization dedicated to liberating our marginalized children of color. Since 2018, we have endorsed Black Lives Matter in Schools Week of Action and encouraged our educators to uphold the four principles of the BLM in Schools movement: ending zero tolerance policies, hiring and retaining more staff of color, adopting ethnic studies in all curriculums on a K-12 level, and the removal of police officers and fully funding behavioral and mental health specialists.

To that end, Madison Teachers Inc. is calling for the following:

- We call for the removal of all School Resource Officers from the four comprehensive high schools **with the caveat that this only occurs when all four high schools are properly staffed with counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and mental health specialists according to the national American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) recommended levels.** Historically, MTI has supported School Resource Officers in our four comprehensive high schools in order to create safe places for our students and staff. We have heard from our union members, including our Black members at the high school level, that School Resource Officers build strong relationships with students, provide a sense of safety and security for all people, and often take on more of the role of a social worker or counselor than that of a law enforcement officer. We acknowledge and appreciate their partnership and commitment to our schools. However, it has become apparent from conversations with our children and community that the benefits of having police officers stationed inside our schools is outweighed by the racialized trauma experienced by some of our community members of color.

Changing our position centers our students' needs. Our children's emotional and mental health needs are not being met and often lead to unstable and unsafe situations. Thus, any discussion of removing SROs from high schools has to include the demand that our MMSD Board and leadership **must** staff all high schools with the appropriate number of student support specialists. Our district is harmfully understaffing our schools. According to the American Civil Liberties Union's metric of equitable staffing in schools, each of our comprehensive high schools is understaffed. East High students should have one more counselor, one more nurse, one more psychologist, and four more social workers. LaFollette students should have one more counselor, one more nurse, one more psychologist, and five more social workers. Memorial students should have two more counselors, one more nurse, one more psychologist, and five more social workers. And West students should have one more counselor, one more nurse, and seven more social workers.

Bottom line: If we remove police officers from our schools, but do not adequately staff those same schools with social workers, nurses, counselors, and psychologists, we are perpetuating harm upon our most vulnerable young people. If we are serious about being anti-racist as a Madison community, we must fully support our students, not just by subtracting one group, but significantly adding another.

- In conjunction with the previous priority, MTI calls for more full-time social workers, nurses, psychologists, counselors, as well as a genuine and comprehensive implementation of restorative justice including staffing, training, and systems at **all elementary, middle, and high schools.** This includes training at every level, including administration. In order to create restorative classrooms, we need to have restorative schools, supported by restorative relationships and restorative systems for decision making. And we must have people solely dedicated to this work within every building.
- MTI calls for MMSD to commit to social-emotional learning that is culturally relevant to the needs of our children and not a canned curriculum geared towards compliance. As Dr. Bettina Love has stated, social-emotional curriculums like "Second Step" make false and racist assumptions of our children and are only used so they are quieter in the classrooms or follow teacher directions. When given the opportunity to meaningfully engage with our students and communities in developing SEL curriculum, our teachers have proven that we can develop stronger social-emotional learning opportunities based on authentic relationships, instead of seeking compliance.

- MTI calls for Crisis Prevention Institute's (CPI) Nonviolent Crisis Intervention training for all employees to ensure all adults who work with children can focus on de-escalating difficult situations instead of escalating the situation (whether intentional or unintentional). We need training that is comprehensive and focused on community-specific trauma-informed practices instead of working through prescribed checklists and modules. This is an equity strategy that would help decrease potential escalations between students and staff in school.
- MTI calls for the collaborative Union/District development of a comprehensive and teacher driven menu of professional development to support educators' growth as anti-racist educators and development of anti-racist classrooms, curriculum, schools, and systems.
- MTI calls for school security assistants (SSAs) to be placed in the professional pool alongside teachers, administrators, and student support staff. During the COVID-19 crisis, SSAs have been designated by the District as essential workers that needed to be at their schools. Our District relies on our SSAs to complete a multitude of tasks dedicated to the safety and security of our school community, including developing strong and authentic relationships with our children outside of the classroom. The removal of SROs logically requires a greater professional investment and support in our SSA workers. Their work must be honored as essential and important year-round, and not just during a crisis.
- MTI demands that this work is not resolved through staff reduction and salary cuts. This work cannot be done on the backs of educators and staff. We call for the District budget office and leadership team to submit a vision that increases educational funding instead of decreasing it. We recognize that a pandemic brings about unique and dire challenges, but the removal of more educators, be it classroom teachers, educational assistants, or other categories of workers, perpetuates racist outcomes by increasing class sizes, decreasing individual supports, and reducing the chances of building authentic relationships -- one of the top ways we know we can improve outcomes for our children of color.

We put forth this vision of the schools our students deserve, refusing to be complicit in the negligent underfunding and understaffing of our schools. We believe in the excellence of our students and together, with our staff, strive to build schools ready to meet our students' needs. We understand that the District is working within extreme financial restraints during an uncertain time. Our community is speaking. We call our District and community to join Madison Teachers Inc. and answer the call. The absence of our community's financial dedication to anti-racism makes us complicit in perpetuating the racist systems given to us. While supporting non-profits and providing bail money are excellent ways to address injustices in our systems, we also need to commit to long-term investments addressing the root causes and significant student need. Because anti-racism is not free. It requires financing of an educational system in which our children of color cannot just survive but thrive. They thrive when we are adding and retaining quality educators, not cutting them. They thrive when the resources and environment they are given is not merely adequate, but bountiful. They thrive if we have schools, staff, and curriculum that humanize, heal, educate, and uplift the excellence of our children and communities of color. They thrive when we have the verve to demand from our leaders and community the resources and support necessary for our schools, children, and communities of color. Otherwise, we are

only doing this for our own vanity, maintaining the status quo, and supporting the systems we are trying to change.