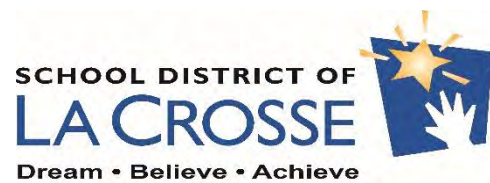


Board of Education

lacrosseschools.org

807 East Avenue South, La Crosse, WI 54601

608.789.7659 • Fax: 608.789.7960



In the midst of this global pandemic, school district administrators and public health officials are trying to come up with strategies for how to best protect students, educators, their families, and our community when school resumes, whether in July for year-round schools or September for all others. At the same time, we need to come up with strategies for how we are going to address the systemic racism that continues to exist in our education system, including our local school districts. Unlike the novel coronavirus, racism in education is nothing new.

Today, institutional racism in education is largely reinforced by policies and practices that appear “race neutral” or “colorblind” on the surface, but result in racialized outcomes. In the U.S. in 2020, racial disparities continue to exist in rates of graduation, educational attainment, special education referrals, access to rigorous coursework and highly qualified teachers, to name but a few examples. In Wisconsin, according to a report by The Civil Rights Project, Black high school students are suspended at a higher rate than anywhere else in the country and we have the second-highest disparity in suspension rates between white and Black elementary students. Based on the Nation’s Report Card, Wisconsin has the largest achievement gap between white and Black students. Within the past decade, here in La Crosse, the juvenile arrest rate -- which reflects a disproportionate number of juveniles of color -- has been higher than those in comparable counties, the state and the nation, according to a 2018 research report by the La Crosse County Juvenile Justice Best Practices Stakeholder Group.

We recognize through our conversations with people in the community, there is often some confusion about what a school board member in the School District of La Crosse can and cannot do. For example, the governance structure of our school board does not give board members authority to directly intervene in personnel or curricular matters. However, one of the most important responsibilities we have as a school board is establishing board policies for the district and ensuring those policies are carried out with fidelity. These include policies governing equity, diversity, and inclusion.

In addition, we can and should speak out against injustice. To be clear, we are angry, saddened, and deeply frustrated by the recent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and the continual unjust killings of countless other Black and Brown people. We publicly renew our conviction to support our administrators, teachers, and staff in the School District of La Crosse in advancing antiracism in our district and ensuring that all our students, as well as our staff, feel safe, welcome, and included in our schools. We will continue to engage in this work transparently and collaboratively with stakeholder groups in our community. We pledge to center voices of color in our antiracism work, recognizing that our students, staff, and families of color are the only ones who can speak authoritatively about their everyday lived experiences in our schools and our community.

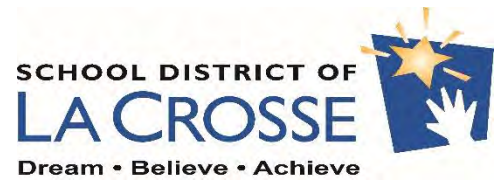
We also recognize that systems of oppression work together to produce injustice. Not only do we need to combat racism in our schools, but sexism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, and all other systems

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of inequality and privilege. We cannot promise we will always ‘get it right’ when it comes to this work, but we can promise when we make a misstep, we will acknowledge it, learn from it, make amends, and start again with a commitment to do better. With humility and integrity, we will consider the significance of our own identities when it comes to engaging in equity work and commit to ongoing education, critical self-reflection, and asking ourselves, our district, and our community the hard questions. We will hold ourselves accountable, but as publicly elected officials, you can and should hold us accountable as well.

School District of La Crosse School Board

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Brenda Leahy

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Brad Quarberg

Shaundel Spivey

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