



WINCHESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Greetings Winchester Families and Community,

Yesterday, the Todd Starnes Show on Fox News Radio ran a news story with the following headline: "School: Honors Classes Will be Decided By Skin Color." This headline and subsequent dialogue was taken out of context. The Winchester Public Schools does not employ quotas in any way; we do not discriminate; and we remain committed to equal educational opportunity.

As a follow up to our community, we believe it is important to formally respond to this story.

On July 24, 2017, all John Handley High School (JHHS) families were sent a Welcome Back letter from their principal, Mr. Michael Dufrene. In addition to the letter, an insert was included that outlined division and JHHS initiatives for 2017-2018 that are a byproduct of the Winchester Public Schools' Strategic Plan. The intent of the insert was to communicate various initiatives to the JHHS community, such as project based learning and professional learning communities. Each initiative included the "Why," "How," and "Vision" of the work being done.

One of the initiatives that was communicated related to equity. Currently, the demographic makeup of our 5th - 12th grade advanced courses is inconsistent with our overall demographic makeup. The division has developed specific strategies in hopes of encouraging a more diverse, high achieving student body to pursue honors and advanced level courses. These strategies include, but are not limited to: universal screening for gifted potential for all 2nd grade students, having all 10th grade students take the PSAT, and the development of an after school program for 3rd and 4th grade students that show promise in math and science.

Our hope is that through dedicated, focused work in the younger grades, we can ensure that more students are prepared and capable of enrolling and succeeding in honors and Advanced Placement classes. Our vision is that through these strategies, our advanced classes will increasingly reflect our entire student body over time. That is the vision being described in the last line of the insert sent to JHHS families. We are proud of this work and committed to a continued focus on equitable outcomes for all of our students.

You can read the portion of the letter in question below:

### **Equity Work**

#### Why

Winchester Public Schools, like many divisions across the country, continue to see outcomes that are disproportionate by race and social class. American demographic trends indicate that America will be a majority minority nation in the next 25 years. Therefore, the new work of American public schools is to develop systems to address disparate outcomes.

#### How

The WPS equity committee has three subsets - community engagement, culturally responsive practices, and proportional outcomes. Each subcommittee presented strategies for implementation in the upcoming year. Examples include the AMPed UP! (Accelerated Math Progressions for Underrepresented Potential) for rising fifth graders, giving the PSAT to all tenth graders in order to generate the AP Potential report for 11th grade registration, universal screeners for gifted identification in elementary school, and culturally responsive training through a train the trainer approach.

#### Vision

Through our collective work, advanced classes such as AP and Honors will have proportional representation. Proportional representation is 40% White, 35% Hispanic, 12% African American, 10% mixed race.

The language used above under the "Vision" heading was not intended to imply or infer that Winchester Public Schools would utilize race to place students into advanced coursework. We sincerely regret that these two sentences were significantly misinterpreted, and that we were not given the opportunity to respond to the concerns at the local level. To the best of our knowledge, prior to this story reaching the national level, the Winchester School Board nor any Winchester Public Schools' employees had received any concerns related to the insert that was sent home.

The academic criteria that exists for entrance into advanced coursework has not changed, and we will continue to have high academic expectations for all students in Winchester Public Schools. In addition, we will continue to support students that demonstrate potential for academic success in order to ensure they are prepared and have the appropriate structures to reach their full potential. Through these efforts, we strive to increase enrollment in advanced coursework, such as honors and Advanced Placement classes.

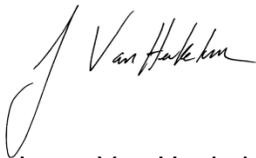
Finally, we would like to address our use of social media during our response to this news story. When we learned of the news story on Tuesday morning, we immediately responded to the

news story with a statement of clarification. In addition, we posted the same statement on the John Handley High School Facebook page and the Winchester Public Schools Facebook page. Many of the comments generated on both the JHHS page and the Winchester Public Schools' page were inflammatory, and some included personal attacks on school personnel and community members. As a result, we chose to delete both of the posts keeping the best interests of our students at the forefront of our decision. We welcome constructive dialogue through email, phone calls, or face-to-face meetings.

Our School Board policies can be located [here](#). In addition, minutes of School Board meetings are available [here](#). We encourage our community to review both our School Board policies and minutes. You will find that the assertions included in the original news story have never been a part of any discussion by the Winchester Public School Board and are not represented in our policy manual, minutes, or the values held by Winchester Public Schools.

Thank you for taking the time to engage in this critical conversation for Winchester Public Schools. We look forward to seeing students in our school buildings tomorrow for our first day of school!

Sincerely,



Jason Van Heukelum  
Superintendent  
Winchester Public Schools



Erica Truban  
School Board Chair  
Winchester Public Schools



Mike Dufrene  
Principal  
John Handley High School