

*MySouthborough's transcript of Jen Primack's full public comment at the NSBORO Combined School Committee meeting on June 13, 2024.*

So, I wanted to begin by expressing my sadness about recent events -- events that I believe highlight some systemic issues in both our schools and our towns. I've been on school committee for over six years and for those who may not know me: I'm also a parent with a child in the public schools, professionally I'm a clinical psychologist and researcher, and culturally I'm a Latina person, a woman who grew up outside of the United States.

I believe that we currently have the opportunity to come together as a district to push forward change and engage in difficult conversations. As a school committee, we should reexamine our policies, take a closer look at professional development requirements, and adjust our priorities.

In that vein, I would also like to make a plea to our Administration and community that we not lose sight of this opportunity to explicitly address racism. That we not shift the discussion to one about personal grievances unrelated to the core issue of racism.

This is not to suggest that we don't have other important equity issues to tackle in ensuring that our students have equity and inclusion in the schools. But rather that when we shift the conversation away from how we manage systemic racism, we end up simply reinforcing underlying problems and minimizing the voices of those in our community who have faced these systemic issues. I spend a lot of time and energy thinking about DEI, both at work and in my role in the school committee. And we have a lot of work to do with the district and the community.

That said, the narrative that the administration hasn't taken action steps is quite simply inaccurate and one that I feel compelled to correct. The equity audit that was referred to in the petition was in fact initiated proactively by this Administration in 2022. As a result of this audit the district created the Coalition for Equity, a group made up of teachers, community members, parents and administrators. In the last several years, the district has implemented the World of Difference program, has created and implemented the data analytic view platform (which is something that was a recommendation from the audit), has partnered with ADL doing bias training with all faculty and staff, has further developed and implemented windows and mirrors in the lower schools, and has implemented Core Curriculum with teaching and learning team. Our current ELA curriculum now has civil rights content embedded within the curriculum. We've also expanded our ESL program and made changes to professional development. Thanks to feedback from teachers in the collaborative study calendar group that was coordinated by Greg, our teachers will now have additional professional development days where we can do a better job of addressing racism.

Highlighting those action items is not intended to minimize the extent of what we still need to do. We have a long way to go when it comes to handling racism in our schools. What happened in our Neary classrooms this year was traumatic for many children and their families. I believe the work we need to do should be a partnership with the community. Our schools are not these isolated in institutions that exist in a vacuum. They exist embedded within our sociocultural ecosystems in which systemic racism continues to be a reality.

I hope that as we move forward, we all can focus on what changes need to be made and take those steps together within our schools and in partnership with our communities.

