

September 30, 2021

Dear Washington Central Community,

Taking care of our school community is one of the most important things we do. We want to ensure that our schools are places that are both physically and emotionally safe for all. To that end, this week, in addition to sharing updates about COVID, I am thrilled to provide information about our newly forming Humanity and Justice Coalition.

First, our COVID numbers. This week we have had 2 positive COVID-19 cases, both of which impacted U-32. On Monday 639 students and staff members participated in voluntary surveillance testing. That is 102 more than last week. So far we have received attestation forms and proof of vaccination from 45% of our students ages 12 and up.

Second, I want to clarify something about how we report our COVID case numbers. There have been 2 instances when we have become aware of a member of our school community testing positive for COVID-19. However, due to extenuating circumstances, we have also determined that there were no close contacts in our schools. As such, we have not notified families of those cases and we have not included those numbers in our weekly count. Also, a few students or staff members have received inconclusive surveillance test results. Our response has varied based on the circumstances. The most important thing to know is that people who have received inconclusive results have taken a second test and have not come to school until they have received a confirmed negative result. Further, no one has been deemed a close contact.

That brings me to my third point regarding COVID. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "Nothing endures but change." That quote certainly rings true for me this fall! It is important for you to know that the VT Agency of Education and the VT Department of Health have revised their guidance for schools a few times this fall. Each time we receive revised guidance, we examine and revise our practices accordingly. The AOE is planning to implement a "test to stay" program that may impact quarantining practices, contact tracing, and surveillance testing. I will share more details with you in the weeks to come as I know more.

It is with great joy and anticipation that I introduce and invite you to the work of our soon-to-be formed Humanity and Justice Coalition. This coalition has been in the making for a number of years now, and we are thrilled to move it forward! I hope that you will take a few minutes to read the beautiful piece below and consider expressing interest in joining the Humanity and Justice Coalition. The introduction and invitation were co-written by U-32 school counselor Ellen Cooke, WCUUSD Instructional Coach

Jenn Ingersoll, and WCUUSD equity scholar-in-residence Shelley Vermilya. They will be co-facilitating the Coalition this year.

# **Humanity and Justice Coalition**

## **Introduction and Invitation**

### **Introduction**

When the Black Lives Matter flag raising was approved in 2018 by the Washington Central Unified Union School District Board, they requested the district create an Equity Council. In February 2021, a dedicated group of educators and administrators studied issues of intersectional justice in our schools. They envisioned surveying the district's current practices and creating a coalition for intersectional justice initiatives. The group applied for a grant from the VT Agency of Education that allows for the development of an Intersectional Justice Coalition. WCUUSD was awarded the grant in June 2021. The Council was renamed the Humanity and Justice Coalition with a Vision Statement, written by members of the group of educators and administrators.\*

### **Humanity and Justice Coalition Vision Statement**

The Washington Central Unified Union School District is dedicated to taking concrete actions that provide a safer and more supportive learning environment that is free of barriers; one that affirms the identity of each of us and acknowledges and celebrates differences to create a sense of belonging for each person connected to our schools. The school district is committed to creating inclusive educational opportunities that are relevant both historically and culturally, addressing the impacts of bias, prejudice, and discrimination while building more opportunity for us to thrive rather than merely survive. This statement represents a commitment within our school district to acknowledge and end oppression and oppressive systems, to center our full humanity of all in our community, and to keep broadening our perspectives. These identities — including and not limited to race, color, religion, creed, national origin, ethnicity, marital status, family composition, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, varying physical and mental abilities, and socioeconomic status — carry socially constructed meaning and value. Our commitment is to the development of cultural humility and personal growth that is best supported in a climate that respects differences and provides a sense of belonging and inclusion.

### **Scope of the Work**

In accordance with the grant, coalition membership is made up of the following stakeholders: 2 co-facilitators (representing the middle and high school), 1 equity scholar in residence, 2 community members, 2 middle/high school students, 2 elementary staff/faculty/administrator members, and 1 board member.

As stated in the grant, the top priorities include:

- Developing, implementing, and monitoring policies, practices and strategies that support culturally-responsive and inclusive school communities;
- Facilitating the development, implementation, and monitoring of culturally responsive and inclusive curriculum;

- Developing strategies focused on diversifying our educator workforce to address educational equity gaps within our district.

\*The following cohort of writers were involved in creating the vision statement -- which the WCUUSD Board recommended be reviewed by the Board Policy Committee -- and applied for and received a state grant for this work: Meg Allison, Mary Bove, Kelly Bushey, Alison Byrnes, Ellen Cooke, Krista Dy, Cat Fair, Jenn Ingersoll, Amy Koenigbauer, Karen Liebermann, Alyson Mahony, Jennifer Miller-Arsenault, Shelley Vermilya

## Invitation

You are invited to apply to become a member of the Humanity and Justice Coalition. We are seeking members who are passionate about issues of equity, inclusion, humanity, and justice. To complete the coalition membership in accordance with the grant, we need the following stakeholders: 2 community members, 2 middle/high school students, 2 elementary staff/faculty/administrator members, and 1 board member. Once the coalition is established, the time commitment can be determined. These are stipend positions (to be further defined).

We are seeking members with the following attributes:

- Being open to new ideas
- Ability to stay curious
- Awareness of social justice issues in our community and for our students' future
- Expertise in the areas of focus stated in the Vision Statement
- Ability to work collaboratively
- Being comfortable with not being attached to specific outcomes
- Ability and willingness to generously listen

If you are interested in applying, please complete [this application](#) by October 15, 2021.

Finally, on Wednesday, October 6 at 6:00 p.m. our school board will be hosting a community forum. The focus is on the current state of our WCUUSD Implementation Plan. You can find the details and the Zoom link on our district website, [www.wcsu32.org](http://www.wcsu32.org). We hope that you can join us to learn more about this important work.

As always, please reach out if you have any questions or concerns. I can be reached at [jmillerarsenault@u32.org](mailto:jmillerarsenault@u32.org) or 229-0553.

Warmly,

Jen Miller-Arsenault  
Interim Superintendent