

Friends for Equity In Avon Schools

February 15, 2021

Avon Board of Education
Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Superintendent
34 Simsbury Rd
Avon, CT 06001

RE: Community Support and Participation in Fostering Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at APS

Dear Avon School Board Members and Dr. Carnemolla,

This letter comes to you from *Friends for Equity in Avon Schools*. We are an emerging group of Avon Public School parents and concerned residents who would like to support and collaborate with APS in continuing to foster a school environment that embraces cultural diversity, values equity, and provides an inclusive environment where all students feel they truly belong and can thrive.

On July 3, 2020, in response to national events including the death of George Floyd, Dr. Carnemolla sent a letter to APS families and community (saved here: [Message from Superintendent July 3, 2020.pdf](#)) outlining all of the activities taking place at APS to “*create a culture of inclusive practices and to grow learners to be socially conscious adults who value diversity and strive for equity in all facets of life.*” On January 20, 2021 our group met with Dr. Carnemolla, Dr. Rusack and Mr. Medic to discuss the status of the stated objectives and initiatives outlined in Dr. Carnemolla’s July 3rd letter. We are excited about the strategy and encouraged by the progress being made. We look forward to regular, ongoing meetings with Dr. Carnemolla and her team.

We applaud all of this work including professional training for staff, creating a districtwide Equity Council, diversifying literature and course offerings, looking broadly at learners’ needs, focusing on social/emotional learning as it relates to diversity and inclusivity, diverse staff recruitment goals, and participation in the CREC equity council. To that end we’d like to begin a conversation with Avon Board of Education members and continue our conversation with school system leadership to learn more about your goals and priorities, the work you are doing in this arena, how it is being tracked and measured to design for continuous improvement, and explore how we might support and collaborate.

We are a diverse group that began meeting during the summer of 2020 to educate ourselves on diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism. We began a journey of sharing our stories, self-reflection and having difficult conversations about these issues and how they impact us as individuals, our families, our children’s education experiences, and our broader community. Avon and the Farmington Valley is a cherished home where we have chosen to raise and educate our children, in particular because of the great schools and community resources, which we value enormously. We also believe that our community, including the school system, has work to do to improve diversity, equity and inclusion in Avon. As parents, we all seek to raise our children to grow their diverse gifts, learn and respect those of others, become emotionally strong, resilient, and thriving adults who can help build and lead the next generation.

We are excited that Avon High School is supporting the grassroots initiated *Avon Voices for Equity Group*, where students are meeting to discuss diversity, equity and inclusion issues and student leaders are being trained to become ambassadors for anti-discrimination at AHS. It’s tremendous that student voices are being included front and center in this work. We’d love to explore what our group and the broader Avon community can do to support this work.



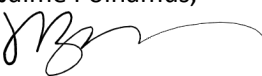
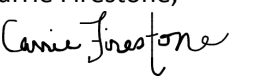
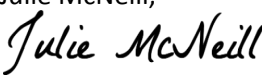
We are excited about the new African American, Black, Latino, and Puerto Rican curriculum approved by the State Board of Education in December 2020 and must be offered as an elective in every Connecticut high school starting the 22-23 school year. We look forward to hearing more about its implementation. (<https://ctmirror.org/2020/12/02/ct-board-of-education-approves-new-course-in-black-and-latino-studies/>)

To learn how parents, educators, and other Farmington Valley community members are collaborating with their respective school systems to raise awareness and work on diversity, equity and inclusion, we have begun conversations with neighboring communities including Canton, Farmington, Granby, New Hartford, Simsbury, and West Hartford. These discussions have been facilitated in part by SEE Connecticut, a Farmington Valley based group with a mission to “bring together students, parents, educators, and community members in solidarity to strive for equity in K-12 curriculum.” Interest and participation in these discussions is growing and we strongly encourage APS BOE members, administrators and educators to join the conversation. More information is available at www.ct-see.com.

For Dr. Carnemolla and her team, thank you for continuing this courageous journey! Further we recognize you are doing this equity work under the tremendous challenges of the coronavirus pandemic. We applaud the job everyone at APS is doing tirelessly and with enormous commitment to ensure the well-being of Avon students and the broader community during the pandemic. Thank you!

We’d like to invite members of the Avon Board of Education and Dr. Carnemolla’s team to an information session on March 23, 2021 at 7PM (a Zoom link will be provided separately). The purpose is to introduce *Friends for Equity in Avon Schools*, share what we’ve learned about other Farmington Valley equity initiatives, and learn about your (individual) goals and priorities. We will continue meeting with Dr. Carnemolla and her team to be a resource and provide support. We look forward to working with members of the Avon Board of Education and the broader Avon community to continue this important work.

Sincerely,

<p>Kim Stevenson,  Parent of two APS students Founding Member</p>	<p>Nakisha Smith,  Parent of three APS students Founding Member</p>
<p>Jaime Polhamus,  Parent of two APS students Founding Member</p>	<p>Carrie Firestone,  Parent of two APS students Founding Member</p>
	<p>Julie McNeill,  Parent of two APS graduated students Founding Member</p>

Co-Signers

Below you will find the electronic signatures of Avon parents and residents in support of this letter.

Annie Simpson 	Megan Witcoskie 	Sarah Thompson 
Kelly McQueeney 	Clay Stevenson 	Janna Beames 
Thej Soni Singh 	Paula Schwartz 	Chris Campbell 
Rebecca Kessler 	Ruth Canovi 	Jazelle Campbell 
Linda Moses 	Carol Shubinski 	Deana Rullán 
Sangeetha Raghavendra 	Amie Lapierre 	Heather Kurtzman 
Colleen Gerrity 	Kershwin Singh 	Seshu Badrinath 
Barbara Ausiello 	Claudine Fasano 	Jackie Tobin 
Wendy Tangman 	Dana Barcellos-Allen 	Kristen Marshall 
Colleen Casey-Nelson 	Sree Raghavendra 	Brian Nelson 
Charles Harvell 	Lisa Levin 	Renee Edge 
Stacey Biernat 	Michelle Traub 	Eliza Massaro 
Christy Yaros 	Hayley Yaros 	Chris Yaros 
Suzanne Szekeres 	Alison Bartolucci 	Pooja Bysani 
Christine Chaise Greenwood 	Eleni Kavros DeGraw 	Kerry Barcellos-Allen 

Co-Signers

Below you will find the electronic signatures of Avon parents and residents in support of this letter.

Lisa Lepito		Valerie Gordon	<i>Valerie Gordon</i>	Jackie Paul	
Elizabeth Zagata		Rajini Krishnan	<i>rajini krishnan</i>	Julie Tacinelli	<i>Julie Tacinelli</i>