

Statement to the Board

Racial Justice Alliance

1/17/18

Dear Montpelier School Board,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us this evening. With the support of our advisor, Mary Ellen Solon, and the School Administration, we are here to encourage the school board to raise the Black Lives Matter Flag at Montpelier High School. Raising the Black Lives Matter flag represents our school's affirmation that the experience of Black Students has been and continues to be inequitable. This act demonstrates our shared commitment to improving our community through empowering and honoring all of our students.

Intentionally or not, many have benefited from and contributed to structural and institutional racism; part of the key to rebalancing lies in open discussion, and addressing the issues as they manifest within our school. For this reason, it is important to recognize that Montpelier High School is systemically racist by default.

Raising this flag is a part of a wider campaign to grow awareness and make changes in our curriculum, climate, and shared understanding of the need for racial justice. Over the past year there have been many steps forward in our community including some direct curricular choices, administrative trainings, faculty in-service, a schoolwide assembly and the Race Against Racism. And yet, we need to do more to raise our predominantly white community's collective consciousness to better recognize white privilege and implicit bias. The Racial Justice Alliance believes putting up the Black Lives Matter flag is imperative for both demonstrating our school's fight for equal education for our Black Students, and modeling a brave and appropriate challenge to the status quo impeding public institutions across the country.

While the protection of all students, including students in other minority groups, is equally important, there is a unique history of oppression and mistreatment of Black Americans that requires its own unique response. The justice and equity of Black Americans is dependent upon justice and equity for all Americans, just as justice and equity for all MPS students is dependent upon that of our Black Students. We view the raising of this flag not as a culmination to our work but rather as a continuation of the work and learning together; a call for action.

We will raise the flag with love in our hearts and courage in our voices. We reject any purported connections to violence or hate that may or may not have occurred under the Black

Lives Matter flag. We recognize that all lives *do* matter, but in this same spirit not *all* lives are acknowledged for their equal importance until black lives have been.

This evening, we urge you to join us in raising the black lives matter flag and keeping it up on the pole until the American flag alone acknowledges the worth and dignity of black lives. With this act you demonstrate your support in continuing the broader equity work being done in our community. Thank you for your time and for your continued dedication to *all* Montpelier Public School students.

Sincerely,

The Montpelier High School Racial Justice Alliance

The Montpelier Board of School Commissioners is committed to making our schools inclusive, to combating institutional racism, and to working toward equity for every student. We also recognize, as our own students have courageously shown and told us, that the experience of African-American students in our schools is not equitable.

Student advocacy and leadership by the Racial Justice Alliance have been critical to increasing awareness and initiating change. This important work has become part of our curriculum and student experience, through classes, trainings, faculty in-service, a student assembly, and the student-led Race Against Racism.

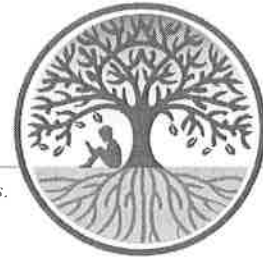
The Board's decision to fly the Black Lives Matter flag at the high school is part of this process of increasing racial equity in our community and ensuring that we are supporting every student. It signals our commitment to equity throughout the District. It is part of our ongoing work of adjusting our curriculum to acknowledge, discuss, and begin to remedy systemic racism. We know that flying this flag will prompt difficult discussions and a range of responses in the community. Those conversations are a necessary part of the work of educating students.

We echo our students in saying that we make this decision to fly the Black Lives Matter flag *with love in our hearts and courage in our voices, and we reject any purported connections to violence or hate*. We believe that our students are not motivated by hostility toward others; only by a desire for respect for every student in our community, and the Board shares this desire.

The Board of School Commissioners directs the superintendent and high school principal to fly the Black Lives Matter flag on the high school flagpole on school days during the month of February. Flying the flag this month is a symbol of our commitment to this work and the concentrated attention the issue will receive this February. We expect the shared efforts to ensure equity to be an ongoing process of continuous improvement.



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*Students will be capable, motivated contributors to their local, national, and world communities.*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
JANUARY 23, 2018**

**MONTPELIER HIGH SCHOOL TO FLY BLACK LIVES MATTER FLAG IN  
FEBRUARY 2018**

MONTPELIER, VT – After more than a year of working with the student-led organization Racial Justice Alliance (RJA), Montpelier High School is proud to announce that it will fly the Black Lives Matter Flag during Black History month.

Vermont has a long history of being at the forefront of civil rights movements. Our state was the first to abolish slavery in its constitution, and the first to enroll and graduate a black student, who subsequently served in state legislature. This initiative builds on that legacy.

“The RJA believes putting up the Black Lives Matter flag is imperative for both demonstrating our school’s fight for equal education for our Black Students, and modeling a brave and appropriate challenge to the status quo impeding public institutions across the country,” said the student representatives from RJA, who came to the January 17 Board meeting and engaged the Board of School Commissioners in a thoughtful conversation on this issue. More of their statement is available at the end of this release.

This resulting action is grounded in the educational goals of the Montpelier Public Schools Continuous Improvement Plan (Equity, Personalization, and Proficiency) and has the full support of the Montpelier Public Schools Board of School Commissioners. An excerpt from the resolution that was passed on Wednesday, January 17, 2018 is available at the end of this release.

“This is a student driven initiative that the school board and school leadership wholeheartedly support,” said superintendent Dr. Brian G. Ricca. “This is grounded in other meaningful and purposeful work around equity that is happening in Montpelier Public Schools. This is not a singular event.”

The board recognizes that not all in our local community and beyond will agree with this decision. We welcome those voices into a constructive and peaceful dialogue, in the hopes of deepening our shared understanding of race and privilege in our education system and broader community.

“This is a response to our collective recognition that we need to be a more inclusive community.” said Principal Mike McRaith. “In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr ‘The time is always right to do what is right.’”

**For more information, please contact:**

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**Board Resolution (selected excerpt)**

*We echo our students in saying that we make this decision to fly the Black Lives Matter flag with love in our hearts and courage in our voices, and we reject any purported connections to violence or hate. We believe that our students are not motivated by hostility toward others; only by a desire for respect for every student in our community, and the Board shares this desire.*

*The Board of School Commissioners directs the superintendent and high school principal to fly the Black Lives Matter flag on the high school flagpole on school days during the month of February. Flying the flag this month is a symbol of our commitment to this work and the concentrated attention the issue will receive this February. We expect the shared efforts to ensure equity to be an ongoing process of continuous improvement indefinitely.*

**Racial Justice Alliance Statement (selected excerpt)**

*Raising this flag is a part of a wider campaign to grow awareness and make changes in our curriculum, climate, and shared understanding of the need for racial justice. Over the past year there have been many steps forward in our community including some direct curricular choices, administrative trainings, faculty in-service, a schoolwide assembly and the Race-Against-Racism. And yet, we need to do more to raise our predominantly white community's collective consciousness to better recognize white privilege and implicit bias. The Racial Justice Alliance believes putting up the Black Lives Matter flag is imperative for both demonstrating our school's fight for equal education for our Black Students, and modeling a brave and appropriate challenge to the status quo impeding public institutions across the country.*

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## Key messages

- This is a student driven initiative that the school board and school leadership wholeheartedly support.
- Vermont has a long history of being at the forefront of civil rights movements. This initiative builds on that legacy.
- The Racial Justice Association believes putting up the Black Lives Matter flag demonstrates our school's fight for equitable education for our Black Students.
- This is a response to our collective recognition that we need to be a more inclusive community.

## Secondary messages

- The board recognizes that not all in our local community and beyond will agree with this decision.
- We welcome those voices into a constructive and peaceful dialogue, in the hopes of deepening our shared understanding of race and privilege in our education system and broader community.

