

Monday, Jan. 16, 2023

Mayor's Update

This morning we gathered at Newton North High School for the City of Newton's 55th Annual Community Celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.

These are my remarks:

This is a particularly important moment in time for us to gather together and to lift up the dreams, the life, and the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The older I get and the longer I serve as Mayor, the more starkly I see the pervasiveness of injustice, racial disparities, and hate ... and the more clearly I perceive the powerful ripple of effects injustice anywhere has on all of us right here in Newton.

For clearly we are not yet a nation or a city where our children are judged by the content of their character, rather than the color of their skin.

And so we cannot yet afford to be colorblind, as racial disparities are prevalent and systemic - in the workforce, in healthcare, in wealth accumulation, in housing, and in education.

Here in Newton the recent 2022 Youth Risk Behavior Survey made clear that Newton's Black high school students feel less connected to our schools than their fellow classmates. In fact, just 57% say they feel safe in our schools while more than 78% of Asian and White students do.

When Black students don't feel safe, their ability to learn is compromised.

This is one element in an intricate web compromising the ability to learn.

On the most recent MCAS tests from the spring of 2022 for English Language Arts, Black and Hispanic/Latinx 10th graders in the Newton Public Schools scored significantly lower than both their White and Asian classmates. The gap in math scores was similarly wide.

Meanwhile data from the Newton Police Department, which is reviewed by our Human Rights Commissioners and which I share with the community, shows that in 2019, twenty hate crimes and incidents were documented in Newton. Last year – three years later – we had 66, a 230% increase.



The intractability of racism and hate can lead to despair, to anxiety, to depression, and to hopelessness.

But we are gathered here today to be buoyed by Dr. King, whose strength in the face of injustice and “audacious faith in the future of mankind” reverberates into our stormy present.

I am also buoyed by the strength of the people in this auditorium, including the passionate advocacy of our students of color for all of us to be active anti-racists.

I am buoyed by the deliberations of our City Councilors, as we work together to open our doors so people of all incomes, all ages, all faith traditions, and all races can find a place in our city to lay their heads.

I am buoyed by the work at City Hall as we link our residents to services to help overcome the disparities in access to mental health resources, economic stability and economic mobility *and* as we work to hire exceptional police officers, fire fighters, city employees and teachers who represent everyone who lives in our community.

To the large network of parents committed for years to forging racial justice, to educators in the Newton Public Schools embedding culturally responsive pedagogy into their teaching, and to the leaders of NPS on the School Committee and at the Ed Center – including Kathy Lopes – I am buoyed by our tireless work to, I quote, “Develop all students’ social, emotional and academic competencies so that race and other forms of identity are not predictors of academic success.”

We must provide all students with excellent and rigorous academics while simultaneously fostering educational equity and social & emotional well-being. In fact, these are inescapably mutually reinforcing elements of public education, a three legged foundation that must be rock solid – legs that are not shaved down to be equal but rather tall legs that allow all of us to pull up to the counter together to break bread: academic excellence, educational equity, and social & emotional well-being.

I hear from some that the strength and excellence of our Newton Public Schools are being undermined by our focus on diversity, equity and inclusion *and/or* on the emotional well-being of our students.

I know in my heart and in my head that we are a City that must provide academic rigor while remaining laser focused on an educational system where we live the values of Dr. King’s dream.

For as Dr. King understood, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”

I am so often moved here in Newton by the multitude of networks of mutuality, by the abundance of Newtonians who care deeply about their neighbors and so often give their time, talent and treasure to promote our common good.

With this abundance— with this privilege – we Newtonians know that to whom much is given, much is required.

Thank you to the many community members who worked together on today's program to remind of us of these truths - Ellie, Kate, Hattie, Cindy, Ranande, Tony, Karen, Emily, Joe, Meghan, Tamika, Susan, Nicole, Devlin, Blair, and Liz and especially the Harmony Foundation, thank you.

Let me close with how I want to live Dr. King's legacy – by paying forward this abundance, by actively beating back hate and racism, and by caring for all our children, and by giving all our children access to opportunity, to excellence in education, and to infinite hope for a better future for “The time is always right to do what is right.”

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

P.S. Watch this morning's entire Celebration at vimeo.com/newtvgov; it's worth watching to the end to hear keynote speaker Dr. Jessie Tauriac from Lasell University. (The program begins at minute 11:45)



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