



TOWN OF WAYLAND

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Dear Members of the Wayland Select Board:

In our advisory capacity to the Select Board, the members of the Wayland Human Rights, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee (HRDEIC) are writing to share our thoughts following the November 10, 2022 Wayland School Committee meeting about allegations made against Wayland Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Omar Easy. Our purpose in writing is not to comment on the specifics of the case, which we understand is under active investigation, but instead to propose a set of questions that we hope will inspire reflection and creative thinking about how all parts of the Wayland community can work together toward the goal of creating a community of belonging.

Following are a brief summary of the situation as we understand it, an explanation of why the HRDEIC is addressing this subject and a list of questions for your consideration.

Background

The School Committee is hiring an independent investigator to look into anonymous complaints made to the School Committee about Dr. Easy. The complaints stem from a meeting of the Administrative Council on October 13, 2022 that addressed bullying incidents among teachers within the schools. The School Committee considered placing Dr. Easy on leave during the investigation, but when they met on Thursday, November 10, 2022 they voted to “engage in the investigation with Dr. Easy keeping his job.”

The November 10, 2022 meeting was, at Dr Easy’s request, open to the public. One of our committee members attended the meeting in person, and almost all of us have watched the three-hour WayCam recording.

Why are we talking about this in the HRDEIC?

When the Select Board established the HRDEIC in March 2021, you stated in our charge that:

“The purpose of creating the Committee is to affirm that the Town of Wayland is an inclusive community that has, as one of its core values, the freedom from discrimination, disrespect, bigotry, other forms of microaggressions, macroaggressions, hatred and oppression, and to reaffirm the Town’s commitment to upholding and defending the rights of all individuals to enjoy the free and equal exercise of their human and civil rights and privileges.”

Two aspects of our charge are particularly relevant: *“The Committee shall...1) recommend programs and initiatives to promote diversity, inclusion, awareness and anti-discrimination in the Town...and 2) recommend resolutions or policies for adoption by the [Select Board] or the Town [Manager] or for the [Select Board] or Town [Manager] to recommend for adoption by other departments, boards, and committees within the Town”*

The HRDEIC is charged with addressing issues that involve racial differences. Dr. Easy is Black and the School Committee members are White. Whenever people of different racial identities have a conflict, race is always in the room whether we name it or not. This current conflict may not be about race but it includes race – which adds a layer of complexity and which is why it is on the HRDEIC’s radar.

Questions to consider

We have learned from our own experiences that navigating cross-racial communications can be hard, even when there are good intentions and shared goals. We offer the questions below with the recognition that leaning into diversity, equity and belonging can be uncomfortable; but the rewards of leaning in are immeasurable, and the more we expand our circles of empathy the better people we become and the closer we get to becoming a community where everyone feels like they belong.

We encourage you to ask the questions below of yourselves, and of town committees, boards and departments, to reduce the likelihood of conflicts involving racial or other identity-based differences and, when conflicts do occur, to bring a diversity, equity and belonging lens to the situations. We hope these questions will spark conversations around how our community’s policies and practices align with our values; and what it takes to build a culture in Wayland where people of all identities, racial or otherwise, feel safe and secure to live, work, study, worship or spend time.

Questions to address conflicts when they arise

- If there are policies and procedures for addressing complaints and conflicts, what would it take to evaluate them from a diversity, equity and belonging (DEB) perspective? If there are no such policies and procedures, what would it take to develop them?
- Who might be designated to apply a DEB lens when complaints and conflicts arise?
- For conflicts that involve racial or other identity-based differences, what would it take to be sure that all channels of resolution are fully exhausted before elevating the conflict to the legal system? (Internal channels could include consulting with Human Resources or a DEB director. Other channels could include professional mediation, facilitated dialogue, or restorative justice practices.)
- When internal or external professionals are brought in to address a situation involving racial or other identity-based differences, how can we ensure that they have deep training or experience in DEB issues?
- When conflicts arise that involve racial or other identity-based differences, who is not at the table that should be?

Questions to foster forward movement

- What have we learned about how our community is doing from a DEB standpoint? What additional data do we need, and how might we go about collecting it?
- What else might we do to attract and retain Black, Indigenous and other People of Color as employees and on committees and boards?
- When Black, Indigenous or other People of Color leave their jobs, board or committee positions, what are some possible ways we could use exit interviews to inform future practices?
- When Black, Indigenous or other People of Color stay in their jobs, board or committee positions, what are some possible ways we could use stay interviews to inform future practices?
- What would it take to provide regular DEB, cultural competency or implicit bias training to all those in positions of authority or with evaluative roles?
- How might the Town and the Schools share information about what's working and what's not working to attract, employ and retain Black, Indigenous and other People of Color?

The HRDEIC is grateful for the opportunity to serve as a resource to the Board of Selectmen. Thank you for your commitment to diversity, equity and belonging.

The Wayland Human Rights, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee