



RICHARD MONTGOMERY HIGH SCHOOL

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Damon Monteleone, Principal



July, 2020

Dear Richard Montgomery Students:

By now, I am sure you are aware of the student activism on social media. Across the county, there are roughly ten to twelve schools whose students have created Instagram accounts entitled "blackat..." and "survivorsat...". Richard Montgomery is one of those schools. The purpose of these anonymous accounts are to provide safe spaces for any student to anonymously share their experiences with racism ("Blackat...") and with sexual harassment/assault ("Survivorsat...") within the context of their respective high schools. I have been monitoring these since last week, and was in contact with MCPS officials on Friday, and addressed this topic with staff this week via email.

As principal of RMHS, I understand your need to elevate these issues and applaud the county-wide student activism we are witnessing. You are demanding to be heard. You are demanding to be part of this nation's reckoning with race and I embrace the Instagram initiative as part of the anti-racism work RMHS has already begun. Over the last month, staff have been busy collaborating with the MCPS Equity Team and Study Circles Team as we launch our multi-pronged plan to achieve the **goal of creating an explicitly anti-racist culture at RMHS**. Part of this work includes the development of five anti-racist workgroups. Because every person enters anti-racist work from a different point, we established the following groups:

- joining a book club to learn more about anti-racism and the role we play in making conscious, deliberate choices every day to dismantle the system
- engaging in discussions with other staff and students about different topics related to anti-racism education using short articles, best practices and research
- designing, implementing, and analyzing feedback from students and parents on the topic of antiracism at RM
- reviewing internal, RM policies and programs that may contribute to racism in the school building and create an action plan to revise these policies
- designing learning sessions and facilitating conversations with staff and students around anti-racism to be rolled out in the fall for the entire school community

Close to 50 staff members have signed up to be part of these volunteer summer work groups, and now that we have the structure and process in place, **we want to invite students to participate as co-equal partners in this work**. My hope is that the same student energy we see on social media will translate to a partnership between students and staff to achieve our goal of creating an anti-racist culture at RM; indeed, this will be at the center of our work as a school moving forward.

If you would like to join any of the anti-racist workgroups, please click on the Google form below and fill it out. We will close the form on July 17 and contact you regarding next steps that week. Students who choose to be part of a workgroup will be invited to voluntary work group Zoom meetings as active participants in preparation for the 2020-2021 school year.

<https://forms.gle/V855SP24LsWwCHG76>

I want to state unequivocally that I recognize these are real experiences our students have had, and continue to have, and I am committed to addressing these issues in every possible way. It is vital that student voices be heard. It is physically painful to read some of the anonymous posts on the various Instagram accounts. It is also incumbent upon me to state that RMHS administration and staff take every allegation seriously and follow all protocol and guidelines whenever we have information about allegations of sexual harassment or sexual assault. We always follow all MCPS protocol, and work with our community partnering agencies as per the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) amongst county departments. For specific steps to take if you have information about an alleged sexual assault, please refer to the community message (link below) Dr. Smith sent to parents last week.

(<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/publicinfo/community/school-year-2019-2020/sexual-harassment-20200701.html>). Moreover, you may notify your grade level administrator of the incident, which will begin a process of investigation under our Title IX/Sexual Harassment/Assault protocols. The school's counseling team will work with school administration and the MCPS Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement to identify trusted adults at the school level and ensure our students are supported. We also encourage you to notify the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) immediately by calling (301) 279-8000. Additionally, when notified about alleged acts of racism or hate speech, RMHS investigates in partnership with MCPS and MCPD (if there's a potential crime) and follows protocol as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct and in accordance with MCPS staff conduct regulations.

While I am proud of the work we have done to create a diverse, tolerant, caring and kind, community, I know we have a long way to go to create a culture of anti-racism at RM. This will not be done overnight and it will require us all to look in the mirror and reflect upon our own experiences, actions and responses regarding race. Perhaps most importantly, it will require us to listen to others, and seek to understand before demanding to be understood.

With the utmost sincerity,

Damon Monteleone