

# Dedham Public Schools

*Home of America's First Tax-Supported Free Public School*

**Michael J. Welch**

*Superintendent*  
781-310-1011

**Matthew Wells**

*Assistant Superintendent  
For Business & Finance*  
781-310-1023



**Dr. Ian P. Kelly**

*Assistant Superintendent*  
781-310-1020

**Dr. Sara Stetson**

*Director of Special Education*  
781-310-1025

July 22, 2022

Dear Dave,

I hope you and your family are well. I am writing this letter to acknowledge the important and valid issues you raised regarding the Dedham Public Schools and the subsequent lawsuit you filed in federal court. I am pleased that we are able to amicably settle this matter after the recently filed appeal of the court's decision.

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge and validate the concerns you initially raised regarding your daughter's experiences at Dedham Middle School. You had every right to inquire about these issues, and you followed the appropriate steps in attempting to learn more. You correctly pointed out that the 7th grade social studies curriculum had significantly changed and parents were not informed of these changes. In probing this matter further, you discovered that the district's website did not accurately reflect the new curriculum content, and parents were unable to understand what was being taught. Your legitimate questions prompted additional conversations at the School Committee level that ultimately led to the establishment of a Curriculum Advisory Committee that now brings together parents, community members, and district educators to broadly review and more thoroughly communicate curriculum changes and concerns. Curriculum updates are a necessary and important part of the work of school districts, and effectively communicating these improvements is a critical component of this process.

Your initial inquiry triggered a larger internal conversation about the district's oversight in the teaching of these new curriculum units. More specifically, the sequencing of the curriculum's identity unit and the virtual use of a Black Lives Matter emoji t-shirt by a teacher sparked a series of intense conversations about teacher autonomy and the importance of balanced messaging and viewpoints in the classroom. As you pointed out, positive intentions can often have unintended negative impacts on students. Ultimately, I directed staff to remove these t-shirt emojis and instructed them to not wear these in the classroom in the future.

Finally, I understand that after you raised these concerns at the classroom level, you left that initial conversation expecting to hear directly from the building principal. It appears this was unclear within the school and you did not hear back in a timely manner. I am sorry for this breakdown. Effective two-way dialogue among parents and school staff is the foundation of mutual trust. While we pride ourselves on this connection, in this particular instance this fueled frustration and identified room for improvement.

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**Administration Building, 100 Whiting Avenue, Dedham, MA 02026 (781) 310-1000 [www.dedham.k12.ma.us](http://www.dedham.k12.ma.us)**

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I regret that these initial justifiable concerns ultimately led to where we are today. As you have indicated, I appreciate your recognition of the opportunity to have improved the trajectory of this sequence. With this settlement, I hope we are able to put any divisions behind us and begin the important work of healing through better conversations and listening.

I recognize the school district's opportunity to improve based upon the issues you have identified, and I thank you for raising them. As educators, I believe we can always learn from our experiences. Thank you for your many years of dedicated commitment to the development of student-athletes in Dedham.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael J. Welch". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Michael J. Welch  
Superintendent