



June 16, 2020

Dear Dr. Hynes,

We would like to thank you for your June 3 letter responding to the death of George Floyd and the national groundswell for racial justice. We commend your pledge to adopt a comprehensive anti-racism component to our curriculum. This step is essential and overdue, and as you note, it must be part of a broad commitment to meaningful action against systemic racism in our district.

For more than 25 years, AGATE of Port Washington has advocated for policies that meet the unique needs of diverse gifted students and other advanced learners, and our mission statement has long emphasized that all students deserve an appropriate and challenging education designed to help them achieve their fullest potential. With this in mind, we believe our responsibility is three-fold: (1) to examine our own policies and actions and identify ways we can promote greater equity; (2) to acknowledge the deep inequity that exists in access to gifted and talented programming, enrichment opportunities, and advanced coursework in Port Washington and school districts across the nation; and (3) to advocate and support district policies and practices that will overcome these inequities.

AGATE has made diversity and access a priority in recent years and pledges to continue that work going forward. This past year AGATE made a commitment to publicizing and providing language access for each of our events. In addition, we have been working for several years to diversify our Recent Graduates Panel. In the coming year, we plan to continue to diversify our board and launch an initiative to educate the community about diversity in gifted education through our Spring Speaker event.

We urge the district to:

- Undertake a systematic study of the experiences of students of color in the Port Schools from Pre-K through graduation, including their access to enrichment programming and advanced coursework.

- Adopt more equitable methods for identifying gifted students. The National Association of Gifted Children recommends screening all children using multiple measures and benchmarking against local norms to increase diversity. Please see the PEP report prepared by Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Ed.D., pages 40, 44, and 73-74. (Attached)
- Provide professional development for teachers and guidance counselors to help them identify and support advanced learners from underrepresented communities.

At the June 5th Diversity Committee meeting, we were pleased to hear you discuss the need to hire more teachers and administrators of color and the importance of creating a welcoming environment for educators from diverse backgrounds. As you know, students of color perform better when they see teachers who look like them, and it is beneficial to all students to learn from teachers from a wide range of communities.

Dr. Hynes, we hope we can contribute to the important conversation your letter has started and support your efforts to end systemic racism in our district. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues sometime after the July Board Reorganization Meeting.

Thank you,

Kim Keiserman and Nanette Melkonian  
Co-Presidents, AGATE of Port Washington