
Eric M. Conti, Ph.D.
Superintendent

June 4, 2023

Dear Burlington Community,

One of the core values of the Burlington Public Schools, including Marshall Simonds Middle School, is our respect for human difference. We are committed to acknowledging and celebrating the diversity that makes up our community, and we strive every day to make our schools a place where anyone can feel safe and welcome.

The rise in anti LGBTQ+ violence across the country is unacceptable and has no place in our schools. We recognize that intolerance can manifest in many different ways, and unfortunately our school community experienced intolerance during the school day on Friday. Students who participate in the Spectrum Club led a celebration of National Pride Month that included posters in support of identity pride, and other symbols of LGBTQ+ identity such as rainbow flags and clothing. Unfortunately, some of these symbols were damaged on Friday during the school day by some students. The Spectrum Club is one of many interest-based clubs where students who share similar interests, along with allies, can gather and support one another. Like any spirit day celebration at MSMS, participation is optional. Respectful behavior across the entire student body, however, is non negotiable.

I recognize that discussions and celebrations of individual identity are complex and impacted by individual values, religions, and cultural norms, the result of which may include expressions of racism, anti-religious hate, ableism, and in this case homophobia. The Burlington Public Schools are obligated to provide a safe environment for all students to feel safe, seen, and respected without retaliation.

We ask all staff, teachers, and members of the Burlington Public School community to join us in taking a stand against homophobia and identity-directed hateful actions. We also recognize that it is not enough to publicly denounce these incidents as they happen. As a school system we have a unique opportunity to educate our community on the nature of these events. The work we do in the Burlington Public Schools and at MSMS is not easy. It often leads to difficult and uncomfortable conversations. Nevertheless, we encourage you to discuss differences with your families to try and make sense of how one's actions always impact others.

The Burlington Public Schools believe in the individual dignity and humanity of each and every person in our community. We embrace everyone for who they are and for what they bring to our schools and larger community. Our staff have and will continue to receive resources, materials, and training to help identify and respond to identity bigotry and discrimination. As these lessons extend beyond the classroom, we invite all students, parents, guardians, and other community members to participate in this ongoing dialogue. A list of resources on how to talk to adults and children about identity hate is available below.

Let us all work on being kinder to each other.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Conti". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Eric" and the last name "Conti" clearly distinguishable.

Eric M. Conti, Ph.D.
Superintendent

Resources:

[Confronting Anti-LGBTQ+ Harassment in Schools](#)

[Responding to Hate and Bias at School](#)

[Responding to Bias Incidents in Middle and High Schools](#)