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[www.fnesu.org](http://www.fnesu.org)  
Lynn Cota, Superintendent

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Dear EFMHS Families, Community Members, and Vermont Education Leaders,

I wanted to reach out to you after our school and students have again been in the headlines for the wrongful actions of two students. I want to talk about what has happened, our school community, what we've done and how we hope to move forward.

The news headlines are not the image of our students, schools, and community that we would want to have portrayed. Unfortunately, those incidents did take place. Two of our students made remarks that were racist during sports events involving Middlebury in the last year; one last winter, and one this past fall. Another remark has been attributed to a community member attending the same Enosburg sports event last winter. Last week Middlebury administrators informed us that a Middlebury parent recently reported to them that during a playoff game in Enosburg almost a year ago that a spectator, or spectators, held up their fist, which was interpreted by them as the black power sign. The acts that were substantiated here in Enosburg were addressed, with both disciplinary action and an educational component.

We have a wonderful community of students, families and staff who are loving and caring. We have 1,880 students in our supervisory union. Our students are diverse in many ways, including racial diversity with 6 percent or 113 of our students identifying as black, indigenous, or people of color. Part of our responsibility as educators is that we must help students who make mistakes learn and grow from them. That's what we are doing. Internally, at Enosburg Falls High School and throughout the Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union, we are actively working as a learning community to provide a safe and healthy atmosphere for all our students. We want all students to feel safe, happy, and a deep sense of belonging in our schools. We also want all our guests to feel welcome, and safe when they visit our community.

When we met with Middlebury educators, they shared the concerns of the girls basketball team. We discussed a number of steps that could support the Middlebury athletes return to Enosburg including increased supervision, developing a shared statement from team leaders, and playing in a closed gym. In the interest of all our students, we agreed to everything requested by the Middlebury team. Ultimately, Middlebury's team decided they would not come to Enosburg or play at all. The decision was made to have the game be considered a "no count" game, not a forfeit. In addition, we asked Middlebury to bring together students and educators to work on restorative healing with a neutral restorative practice expert, in a neutral location so that our students and educational communities can move forward. Middlebury has not yet responded to that offer.

Middlebury community members have called on our community to deal with the issues of racism holistically and at a systems level. I want to assure you that we have done so and will continue to do so. We are a learning community. While we have disciplined students for racist comments, we have invested and will continue to do so in learning and changing behaviors related to equity, justice and inclusion including:

- Training for every staff and teacher that is prioritized in our professional development.
- Participating in an equity audit conducted by external auditors.
- Continuing our work to assess our individual school cultures, which is also referred to as the hidden curriculum.
- Training for our students as part of their regular advisory curriculum.
- Hiring a full-time district equity director.
- Outside speakers for the school and community including events planned for February (bullying), March (the Listen Up musical) and April (Race and Song) that include facilitated discussions. We welcome you to join us. *Please see more [here](#).*

A summary of our FNESU work is available [here](#).

The issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion are serious, challenging, complex, and emotionally intense. Our commitments are and will continue to be:

- Students safety and well being come first.
- We'll have an assertive response to any incidents.
- We will keep working with our staff, our students, and will more explicitly engage with our greater community to disrupt bias, injustice and racism.
- We will continue to create a system that is more just for all our students, staff, families, guests and community members.

Incidents of racism, bigotry, and hate are happening in schools and communities throughout Vermont and our country. In my leadership role for my community and my state association, I am committed both professionally and personally to creating a proactive response from my fellow educators to do more than blame bad actors but to join with me to commit to finding a way forward so that all students and schools can work to build a safer Vermont for all of our kids.

Sincerely,

Lynn Cota  
FNESU Superintendent