TO: Burlington Board of School Members

FROM: Anyier Manyok, Henry Tornwini, & Edmunds Middle School Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Collective (Aoife Crainich, Amelia Dion, Isaac Doggett, Petra Fanslow, Walter Hood, Myriam Huener, Greta Ketterling, Anyier Manyok, Adriel Mendez, Henry Tornwini, and Miles Carr) (Supported by Mr. Jeremy DeMink [EMS Teacher], Mr. Eliaquin Gonell [UVM Graduate Student], & Dr. Lance Smith [UVM Faculty])

DATE: November 12, 2019

SUBJECT: Motion to Raise the Black Lives Matter flag at Edmund’s Middle School

Anyier Edmund’s Middle School Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Collective feels strongly that Edmunds Middle School should stand in solidarity with Burlington High School, South Burlington High School, Montpelier High School, and other schools committed to raising the Black Lives Matter (BLM) flag.

Henry Students of color make up 28% of the Edmunds Middle School (EMS) community. Flying the BLM flag not only recognizes students of color but also creates opportunities for the community to engage in important discussions about why it is important to publicly recognize that black lives matter.

Anyier This proposal is supported by our scientific research efforts which were supported by UVM researchers. Data that we collected as 6th graders from the 2017/2018 school year found that:

- 36% of students agree that EMS students engage in racial discrimination. White and Black students equally agreed on this question.
- 47% of Black students agree that students are discriminating against other students based on race.
- Roughly 1/3 of White students and 1/3 of Black students agree that EMS teachers engage in racial discrimination.

Henry These data present a serious need for actions around making sure that students of color can feel welcome, safe, and valued within the EMS community.

Anyier Although there are many changes that need to take place in order to achieve such a goal, the EMS YPAR collective feels that raising the BLM flag is one major step in the right direction.

Henry By approving this proposal to raise the BLM flag at EMS, the district would validate the difficult barriers and the hostility that students of color and their allies experience at EMS and schools all across the nation.
Anyier The BLM movement aims to eliminate racial profiling, excessive use of force by police against people of color, and racial bias in the criminal justice system.

Henry In American society, Black lives and other marginalized identities have fallen victim to the systemic inequality that is inherent within our public and private institutions, hence the need for such a movement.

Anyier Therefore, it’s critical in today’s learning environments that students of color not only feel protected but promoted and welcomed within our schools.

Henry We understand that some people in our community will inevitably express backlash regarding this proposal, however, the 358 student and staff signatures we have collected on our petition to support this proposal demonstrate that roughly 87% of the EMS community is in support of this action. We would happily submit this petition to the board for verification.

Anyier As Burlington High School student leaders expressed last year in their proposal to raise the BLM flag, “By being among the whitest states in the country, we have an obligation to further the well-being of our brothers and sisters of color so that their skin color is no longer a predictor of social, economic, academic and health outcomes.”

Henry, We agree wholeheartedly with this sentiment and hope to do our part in this effort by flying the BLM flag at our school too.

Anyier We propose that beginning in Spring 2020 the EMS BLM flag be raised each year during Black History Month and that it remains flown until summer vacation. It is our hope that the EMS community continue this practice until the day that marginalized students and their allies agree that there is no longer a need to bring attention to systemic issues that disproportionately harm students of color.

Henry Below we have provided statements from EMS students who urge the flag to be flown:

Anyier “If we did put one up it would show that everyone is welcome here and that we’re not excluding anyone.”

- EMS Grade 7 Student

Henry “We want everyone in Burlington Vermont to know that Edmund’s respects everyone no matter the color of their skin and inside Edmunds, everyone should feel safe.”

- EMS Grade 8 Student

Anyier “I want to feel wanted.”

- EMS Grade 8 Student
Henry Thank you for considering our proposal, I hope you see how raising the BLM Flag would benefit all students at Edmunds Middle School.

Anyier And now each member of the YPAR team has something brief to say.