

Statement from Alexandra Oliver-Davila:

I believe deeply in the students of Boston and have committed my entire career to pursuing an agenda that would ensure every single child and teenager in our City has the same opportunity to grow, flourish, and thrive. As a lifelong advocate for students during my work, in my personal life, and as a member of the Boston School Committee, I have sought ways to elevate student voice and push for policies, systems, and structures that keep student benefit at the center of all considerations.

Since becoming Chair of the School Committee in November, I have worked hand in hand with the Superintendent to assure that all virtual meetings have interpretation in all of the BPS major languages as well as American Sign Language. The Committee recently adopted the MassCore standards, which has been on the agenda for a decade, as well as attendance, promotion and grading policies that for too long have negatively affected our most vulnerable students. I have led the School Committee and community on the acknowledgement and adoption of core goals and values in an effort to be a data driven, more effective school board. In my time as a member I led the Superintendent search process and also participated on the working group that created a policy to protect the sharing of student data. I am proud of all of my contributions and honored to have served with amazing School committee colleagues over these past 5 years.

I do this work because I was one of the very students we are focused on supporting today. I was an immigrant new to the Boston area. I was ostracized and teased incessantly. I was called racial slurs, during recess classmates sang to me, "you don't have to live like a refugee", I was spat on, called a spic and faced regular physical threats of violence. I share this not to seek pity but to share the reality of my youth. It ultimately made me who I am today and helped shape my approach, commitment, and dedication to my work. I work to ensure students do not feel the way I felt.

During the School Committee meeting on October 22, I felt transported back to my youth as members of the public delivered testimony that was in many instances directly racist in nature, comments that were meant to portray students like me, like my daughter, as 'other' or as someone not worthy of the exam school seats, or as taking an exam school seat away from their rightful owners. It was painful. And in the heat of the moment it caused me to vent by sending inappropriate personal text messages to one of my colleagues. I regrettably allowed myself to do what others have done to me. I failed my own standards in this private exchange. These messages matched the sharpness of what was being delivered via public testimony that night.

I apologize for my comments and the hurt they have caused. I own what I said just as I own the pain I felt that night and have felt far too often as a woman of color leading an organization committed to racial justice. The commentary of that evening brought me back to the deep shame that I was forced to feel about my language, my culture and my ethnicity. It brought me back to the shame I was made to feel about my mother who had an accent and a grandmother who didn't speak English. It triggered that old message: "you don't belong and you are not good enough." I regret my personal texts, it was inappropriate, but I am not ashamed of the feelings from history that made me write those words. My lived experience of growing up fearing people from certain neighborhoods, the neighborhood I lived in, is real and is what helped shape who I am today. As part of my commitment to antiracist work, I am looking into

my past, into the ideas and experiences that have shaped my worldview, and am working to understand and manage my biases and focus instead on the work at hand. All humans have biases and I will continue to work on getting beyond my own personal biases.

Additionally, the constant racial undertones and personal attacks at School Committee meetings and in emails members regularly receive have been overwhelmingly stressful. The polarization is so personal it does not allow for us as a committee to have an open and transparent dialogue about issues related to equity and racial justice but instead has become either you are with us or against us. The most heartbreaking part is that we are wasting time and energy that should be used to focus on the well-being and success of BPS students. I know many people do not want to hear or acknowledge Boston's reputation for its racism as highlighted in the Globe's Spotlight series, "Boston Really Does Have a Racist Reputation" (11 Takeaways from this month's Spotlight series on Race in Boston on <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/12/29/takeaways-from-groundbreaking-spotlight-series-race-boston/6C228SexjA7hGfyEsYMnjI/story.html?event=event12>).

I would have liked to stay on and have this moment be a catalyst for conversations that need to happen in this city around racism and the inequality that has played out in our schools for decades. I am stepping down from the Boston School Committee because I do not want my actions to distract from the important work at hand.

I want to thank the many people who shared supportive comments that night, and who have reached out to me in recent days to offer their support. We too often focus on the negative but we should not lose sight of the fact that many members of our community spoke out and spoke up in favor of the temporary policy we passed that night. I hope their voices will continue to be heard.