

Dear PSB Colleagues,

With mixed emotions, I write to share that I will leave my position as the Senior Director of Educational Equity and PSB at the end of July 2023. I joined the district in 2007 after nine years teaching English in Boston and I was blessed to do the same work here at Lincoln School and BHS. More recently, I took on a handful of administrator roles, hopeful that I could support rich learning experiences for educators and children. In all of this time, my deep admiration and love for all of you, my PSB colleagues, has guided me.

I want to share my pride for the work we have done together during my time in Central Office. As a brand new (for the second time) baby department, Haeyoung Koh and I knew that ***school systems like ours will recreate and create exactly what they were meant to create*** unless we (all) committed to listening well and learning together better. Our goals included challenging and disrupting with love and grace; conspiring with fellow co-conspirators to lead a strong cultural vision for the PSB community. So we launched a robust professional learning campaign over two years, involving PreK-12 educators in myriad formats – from department meetings to grade-level team sessions to full faculty Tuesdays to school leadership consultations. PD happened out of our Office on average 3-4 times a week, every single week. We met with churches and collaborated with town and district partners; we facilitated trainings for many parent groups each month, and we regularly visited with students.

The Brookline Educators for Educator Diversity ([BEED](#)) Team formed under our watch and this powerful group of district colleagues has held quarterly recruiting and retention events; they have partnered with colleges, non-profits, town businesses, Central Office leaders and anyone who will listen, to increase the racial diversity of our staff. They are amazing. Similarly, the ongoing justice work of SEED is a tremendous point of pride for our community; we owe our SEED facilitator colleagues a debt of gratitude. I have been blessed to shepherd and facilitate the learning in that transformational program, as well as that of several others, like our four identity-based Adult Affinity Groups, who are beautifully working toward belongingness, amity and repair.

The difficult decision to leave Brookline is one I have made with considerable thought and prayer. I first accepted this position because I wanted to see success in the areas of non-ornamental anti-racism and real, meaningful social justice that I had not seen in schools as a child. That said, I resented the post-George Floyd optical ripple of DEI roles for people of color across the country, and the surface-level investment I suspected would be true in each reactive case. Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed commented years before Floyd's murder that *the diversity worker has a job precisely because diversity and equality are not daily practice*. The idea compelled me and frustrated me. Another wise educator warned: *the work will kill you [person of color] if you're honest about it*. Still, with a heart full of hope and for many reasons, I ran toward this role. I leave it now, just as hopeful, and for many reasons.

It is no secret that we have experienced high turnover of educators of color in Brookline in the last few years. When it happens, especially visible positions like this one, tend to be widely

discussed. If I may, I'd like to offer insight into my experiences over 15 years and most recently. My truth telling today is that the emotional labor of being heavily relied on to "fix" entrenched problems people of color did not create, is real for me. The unhealthy urgency to show immediate results and the pressure to navigate highly complex cultural and systemic changes often feels isolating, tokenizing and unsafe in my brave Black skin. Undoubtedly, this is true for other BIPOC colleagues, community members, and students. I have observed again and again that we let our good intentions and collective **hoping** for racial (or marginalized identity) justice suffice as our "doing" equity. We have stopped shy of the deep work because it is elusive and uncomfortable, or because – even in our privilege – we feel indignant and aggrieved, or we erroneously believe that by now we are expert enough. *When I use the word "we" in those last couple of sentences, I mean all of us, no matter our position in the district or our racial or intersectional identities.* The inherent psychological vulnerabilities involved in this oft misunderstood Director of Equity role are exhausting to contend with, however all the while, harm incidents and injustices continue, requiring constant attention. I will further add that the daily challenge of limited capacity and resources is one hurdle behind other hurdles, like the district's lack of clarity around DEIB goals and metrics, or actionable and aligned commitment to those plans. Haeyoung and I have not had the time to communicate and coalesce the community around our strategies for cultural, organizational and behavioral change because these jobs are not positioned for sanity *and* success. Nor are they primed for protection or longevity. *Dr. Guillory and I have discussed some of these core challenges and agree...my sharing them with all of you, too, is a step toward the kind of transparency that may better support the next team.* These collected pieces are just a few of the reasons why this work is not sustainable for me here, in this season.

I've said to a number of people today that many things can be true at the same time. For all of the adaptive work ahead, we have made beautiful strides. Our almost-completed district Strategic Plan gives me hope; you, beloved colleagues, and our students, forever give me hope. I thank you all for showing up to listen and lean in. Please stay the intentional, accountable course, remembering that the single-most important starting place is self. Equity is a process, NOT a product, and the work is generational. We can and must pace ourselves; we can and must measure impact by shifts in our collective mindsets and behavior. (True co-conspiracy, by the way, is more than expressing sympathy from the sidelines; it includes thoughtful, reflective involvement.) While it is true that we each bear the responsibility of leadership in DEI, perhaps, in the not too distant future, PSB will have an Office of Educational Equity and Strategy that is helmed by a person of color *and* a white-identifying person. Or better still, we'll insist on a truly representative team where educators with gifts and skills in supporting our LGBTQ+ students, for example, help us to dismantle our centuries-old biased/ racist system and rebuild it with a commitment to community, safety, justice, diversity, and actual process-equity.

I am profoundly grateful to each and every one of you. I am humbled to have had the chance to work alongside you for 15 years. I will miss you. Best wishes for a restorative summer and I hope to see you soon.

With deep respect and admiration,

Jenee