



Kathleen A. Smith, J.D.
Superintendent of Schools

May 24, 2023

Dear City Council,

In response to your request related to the inclusion education in Newton classrooms, I offer the following response detailing our plan of action related to developing curriculum and collaborating with community partners to strengthen our offerings for disability awareness in our schools. We are grateful that the City Council shares our commitment to inclusion and ensuring that all students are treated with dignity and respect. The work championed by the Understanding Our Differences (UOD) program is aligned with our district values of providing equitable school experiences for everyone every day. This is indeed a vital priority in the Newton Public Schools.

It is important to know that despite our budget shortfall and resulting reductions, the Newton Public Schools will sustain curriculum work currently in progress to support disability awareness. This includes a scope and sequence of lessons, beginning in kindergarten and extending through fifth grade, which help students to understand and appreciate the differences in how people engage in everyday life, for example, how people play, communicate, learn, listen, move, etc. This work will complement lessons already being taught that are aligned with the Social Justice Learning Standards—a set of anti-bias learning standards with identified age-appropriate learning outcomes. Lessons are designed to build understanding around a variety of aspects of identity.

Upon completion of this foundational curriculum work this fall, we will be poised to explore options for valuable supplemental experiences for our students that will enhance their understanding and awareness, including conversations with external vendors/service providers. Our new superintendent would value the opportunity to learn from the UOD program leadership and find ways to ensure the legacy of the program lives on and does so in a way that is aligned with the current state of the school system, how we work with vendors, collaborators, and volunteers.

Sincerely,

Kathleen A. Smith, J.D.
Interim Superintendent of Schools

KAS/cc