



**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**  
BIRTHDAY OBSERVANCE COMMITTEE OF ARLINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS  
P.O. Box 320, Arlington, MA 02476

Friday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Dear Members of the Arlington School Committee:

We question the review process that has led to your favoring Elizabeth Homan over Victoria Greer to be the next Superintendent of Arlington Public Schools. We elected you to shepherd our schools in good faith, and we appreciate your commitment to a difficult job. However, you must answer to the community as well. The most significant power you have is that of choosing the next Superintendent. Dr. Bodie will continue to occupy the job until July of next year. There is no reason to rush this huge decision of yours.

Also fortunate for you is the fact that the Superintendent search committee narrowed the choices to two people, sparing you any unnecessary vetting of less-qualified candidates. Why then did you rush to poll the committee, especially when there was still dissent among you, and a reasonable request for deliberation from inside the group? The vote came before the offer to discuss. This fact makes us wonder if some of you had prior conversations out of session that propelled the vote that night. Doing so is against the rules. By contrast, recently you gave Arlingtonians ample time and opportunities to weigh in on the principalship of the Gibbs School, which is not as important as the office of Superintendent.

We are concerned about the procedural irregularities in your treatment of the two finalists. First there is the matter of Monday, November 23. Each candidate had 45 minutes that day to converse with members of our Town Meeting, Human Rights Commission, and Finance Committee. There were audio problems during Dr. Greer's session. Despite the stated fact that they should reschedule the meeting to be fair to Dr. Greer, they did not, and the opportunity was lost. The vote took place on the very next day, not during a regularly scheduled meeting, but during a special meeting two days before Thanksgiving. The agenda posted publicly for this meeting was "Super selection discussion"; without mention of a possible vote which would have attracted attention. Perhaps you broke no rules by going ahead with a vote, but you raised many eyebrows.

Did you consider carefully the town interests expressed in D.I.G. letters and the MVNAACP recommendations? Were you not moved by the glowing praise of Dr.

Greer from the Sharon Racial Equity group? Did you make any public statements to dispel the misleading and irresponsible headline published on [yourarlington.com](http://yourarlington.com) on November 11 regarding Dr. Greer? Why did you dismiss member Paul Schlichtman's request for site visits with the two candidates before voting? Mask wearing and adequate distance would make it a safe option, or the site visits could have been virtually conducted. Overall, you have not allowed adequate time for community feedback and reflection.

We were troubled by the response of Len Kardon to Regina Caines on November 29th. He wrote that "we cannot consider either candidate's race in selecting the Superintendent. Thus, we cannot consider the impact on the town's diversity efforts that the selection of Dr. Greer would have simply because of her race." There are, in fact, examples at the state and local levels of specific and targeted recruitment of people of color, including a DESE grant program. Also, the focus report mentions that some parents bemoaned the absence of role models for minority students in our schools.

We have an issue with the disparate questioning of the two candidates as well. It is common practice these days to ask the same questions to each. Ms. Hogan's questioning was narrower in scope and geared toward her areas of expertise. The one exception was a question put to her about her knowledge of Arlington's budgeting process. It was a deer-in-the-headlights moment for Ms. Homan. Notably, the information she did not know was included on page 1 of the Superintendent search focus group's report, which was designed to provide the candidates, as well as the School Committee, with helpful information. In contrast, Dr. Greer volunteered on her own how she would want to honor and build on Arlington's Secondary school excellence in arts and drama (on page 5 of the report) by boosting these fields of study in the primary grades.

The focus report is forthright about the Superintendent's need to understand school budget and finance. Town leaders and others "believe that the Super should understand how a school budget is built and how to explain it to others." Page one continues, "The Superintendent must " be a prominent civic leader...with the ability to explain complex concepts to the public, many of whom do not want to hear 'edu speak'...The most successful superintendents are the best communicators who were the best teachers and building leaders." Ms. Homan has spent little time teaching children, has never been a school principal nor a civic leader, and spouts "edu speak" like the professional teacher of teachers that she is. She is masterful behind the scenes, driving data and giving data analysis instruction, conducting professional development for teachers, and creating progressive curricula that address equity, ethnic and racial sensitivity, and expanded cultural knowledge. Is this the background you think that Arlington needs in a Superintendent? We think that Ms. Homan is underqualified for the position. Dr. Greer is popular with the town manager, finance committee, and parents of Sharon Massachusetts, where she has been the Superintendent for over three years. They admire her and enjoyed working with her. Dr. Greer's success as Superintendent even won accolades from the esteemed Karla Baehr, former Deputy Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

"There was broad consensus in the focus groups that issues of special education need

to be addressed as a highest priority for [our next head of schools]." In fact, the focus report has eight bullet points detailing problems that the Superintendent must confront about special ed. It goes on to say that she must "take on significant improvement in Sped services including building a relationship with parents to work on concerns. This will occupy a considerable amount of time in a superintendency transition and will not be allowed to go unaddressed." Need we remind you that Dr. Greer is an expert in this field, having taught it for years in Nashville? Did you overlook that Dr. Greer improved the integration of students in Special Ed. and was recognized for her achievements in strengthening parent and family engagement, when she was Assistant Superintendent of Cambridge Schools? One specific concern of the Arlington focus groups was addressing the adjustment of SPED students to three different locations during 5th to 7th grades. Is Dr. Greer not primed to fill this role on day one?

In summary, the discrepancies in your questioning of the candidates, the vagaries of your meeting procedure, your disregard or disinterest in the opinions of residents, and your rush to decide, disturbed us greatly. Why you, as Chair Jane Morgan stated, prefer Elizabeth Homan's "promise", "humility" and "self-awareness" to Victoria Greer's expertise, leadership skills, and superb track record, has us scratching our heads. We question your judgement and we demand that you reopen the school superintendent selection process. Please listen to the stakeholders, read the focus report again, engage in debate, and ask more questions of yourselves. Then you may make an informed, rational decision and explain your reasoning to the citizens of Arlington so that it makes sense. This is a rare opportunity; please do not squander it. Dr. Greer has so much to offer Arlington. We will be the envy of other towns with her at our helm.

Sincerely,

*Membership of the Arlington Martin Luther King, Jr. Observance Committee:*

Ian Jackson, Regina Caines, Sherry Hahn, Pearl P. Morrison, Roberta Lasky, Ann Mathes, Jack Cooper, Rev. Dr. Mikel E. Satcher, Kate Cubeta, Alberto Guzman, and Neil Osborne, Esq.

*Community Supporters:*

Arlington DTG

Andy Rubinson, Vice-Chair, Arlington LGBTQIA+ Rainbow Commission

Susan Ryan-Vollmar, Arlington LGBTQIA+ Rainbow Commission

Various residents