
My Concern about Racial Bias in the Arlington MA Superintendent Interview Process

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Cc: Pearl Morrison <pearlpmorrison@verizon.net>, "Cubeta, Kate" <cubetasofarl@msn.com>, "Caines, Regina" <reginaac@comcast.net>

Dear Arlington School Committee,

Please see below or the attachment for my statement of concern about your hiring practices in the Superintendent finalists interview process.

Respectfully,

Rev. Mikel E Satcher, Ph.D.

December 10, 2020

Dear Members of the Arlington School Committee:

In my previous email communication to you, on November 16, I expressed my concern about the Superintendent finalists interview process, with respect to a race-baiting news article that was published five days before the beginning of a week of interviews with the two finalists. As I indicated then, the news article presented a distorted view of Dr. Virginia Greer's character and professional track record, and I was concerned that you would allow the news article to have a negative impact on the committee's decision in selecting the next Superintendent. Three of your members reached out to me and assured me that the negative article would not have any bearing on the interview process and that the process would be fair and just. I trusted their words and believed you would do the right thing. One of you even shared with me a rave report of Dr. Greer's character, work and success as the Superintendent in the town of Sharon, in spite of her being a victim of explicit racial discrimination. However, my trust in your words was betrayed by your actions, not only in your decision to select Dr. Homan over a candidate who was vastly more qualified and more suited for the position than Homan but also in the interview process itself, which I believe wreaked with evidence of racial bias. I listened and watched very carefully during all four nights of interviews, observing a parade of racial bias at work.

Consequently, as a member of the Arlington Martin Luther King, Jr. Observance Committee, I collaborated with my colleagues who were equally disturbed by your actions. We agreed that there needed to be a community response to the School Committee's dereliction in duty and betrayal of the trust that was placed in them. Let me pause a moment first to say that this current letter which I am providing today is solely my own initiative and not one that's sanctioned by the MLK Observance Committee. I only make reference to the MLK letter to provide context to my argument. Accordingly, we sent you a letter of concern, complaint and demand, expressing in the strongest terms but as diplomatically as possible the graphic irregularities and injustice you exhibited in the interview process which many townspeople agree present as an effort to sabotage Dr. Greer's chances of selection as the next superintendent while attempting to elevate Dr. Homan's chances. Since those irregularities are well documented in the MLK letter, I won't repeat them here. However, when I saw the responses which three of my colleagues received from a couple of your members when they submitted individual letters of concern about your actions in overlooking Dr. Greer's superior experience and qualifications and your overlooking the town's expressed commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and equal opportunity as Arlington becomes increasingly more culturally, ethnically and racially diverse every year, I realized that you all needed to see a clearer picture of the true nature of your actions, which I have described above as wreaking with racial bias. You may ask, "Why does he make such a statement."

I will tell you why because it is a statement that is grounded in clear evidence which strongly suggests that you have been blinded from seeing due to your own implicit bias and the School Committee's decades of institutional practice of cooperating with systemic, structural racism. For example, in your response to my three colleagues, you created a straw argument by saying, "I am also sure that you know that we cannot consider race when hiring." That was such a doleful response because no one was asking the School Committee to choose Dr. Greer because of her race; rather they were demanding that you make a selection based upon the candidate with the vastly greater qualifications, experience and suitability for the position. All the evidence, including the analytics, indicate that Dr. Greer is that person. Moreover, when considering the Arlington School Committee's track record for the past several decades, the evidence indicates that you have always considered race by selecting a white Superintendent, often followed by the

racially insensitive statement that I have heard far too many times, “we would hire a minority candidate if we found one that was qualified . . .”

As an African American who has experienced many forms of both explicit racial discrimination and implicit racial bias all my life—since experiencing desegregation of public schools and forced busing in Mississippi in the 60’s-- and because of my previous role as an Affirmative Action officer who has investigated cases of racial discrimination, I know what racial bias looks like, smells like and feels like. One perfect example of the evidence of implicit bias was revealed when one of your officers published a statement saying that you prefer Dr. Homan’s “promise . . .” for the position. Anyone who is vaguely familiar with the analytics surrounding racial bias in the hiring process knows that when paired against one another, the white candidate is evaluated and hired for their “promise” while the candidate of color is evaluated on their track record which in turn is usually unjustly, pejoratively scrutinized in such a way to disqualify them from serious consideration for the position. Statistics even indicate when the white and black candidate either have relatively equal qualifications or when the two finalist are simply paired against one another, the all-white or predominantly white committee almost always chooses the racially biased pathway of *cloning*, i.e., “replicating oneself by hiring someone with similar attributes or background,” essentially functioning as a proverbial gate-keeper to maintain the status quo.

Accordingly, many Arlington residents who watched back to back interviews with Dr. Greer on the Wednesday and Thursday evenings of the interviews were able to witness the public display of such racial bias in living color when Dr. Greer was bombarded with unfair questions about her experience of racial discrimination in Sharon MA. Those two nights were also a display of your betrayal of the people’s trust and an acute departure from your words to me that the Sprague article which muddied the waters against Dr. Greer would not come into play in the interviews. However, in your questioning of Dr. Greer, one of your members stated that the people want to know about the events in Sharon; the evidence suggests that statement was a direct reference to the Sprague article which muddied the waters against Dr. Greer. The people didn’t want to know anything else about those events because they trusted that Dr. Greer became a finalist because both your Committee and the Search Committee had thoroughly vetted both finalists. Therefore, such a statement that the people want to know about Sharon essentially served as evidence of another straw argument which was used to justify selecting Homan over Greer—all clear evidence of racial bias. I will be gracious enough to say that you fell victim to your own implicit bias which has blinded you to the veracity of fault in your actions.

However, that wasn’t my greatest source of indignation about what I believe to be your racially biased interview tactics. On night two of the Greer interviews, the greatest harm of what proved to be evidence of degrading and bold racial bias occurred when your committee allowed one of your members to ask Dr. Greer what she might have done differently to prevent the events in Sharon from happening. In Sharon, Dr. Greer was a victim of documented racial discrimination, compounded by gender discrimination. So, to ask her that question was likened unto asking a rape victim what she could have done to prevent her rape—a brazen act of blaming the victim in both cases.

When viewing each incident in isolation from the others, one might create an argument of defense that might satisfy some. However, when you put the pieces together and see the big picture, one can clearly see your acts in the context of systemic, structural racism. Your being blinded by your own implicit bias will not allow you to understand or accept what I am about to say unless you decide to take on the character of an anti-racist. I can say this with confidence because I, like many people of color, have experienced the same thing that Dr. Greer faced in your interview process (in order to cope with systemic racism, many POC put such experiences away in the back of their minds). So, I asked myself the question, why would they pair a clearly less qualified white finalist against an exponentially more qualified black finalist. Bingo, it appeared to me that the only reason that happened is that the black candidate has to have a blemish in her record which can be exploited, e.g., the Sharon experience. Systemic, structural racism comes into play when the media article performed the role of publicly muddying the waters against Dr. Greer, which in turn served as the community cover for both asking Dr. Greer the racially biased questions and selecting the vastly inferior, unqualified and unsuited white candidate to succeed in the final selection. Moreover, structural racism comes into play as further cover when the current superintendent asked the “blemished “ black candidate to apply for the position, giving the black candidate confidence that she would have a fair chance of succeeding as the new superintendent; the voting says she never had a chance. The ironic part of the manifest structural racism occurred, if the consecutive Sprague article is correct in saying that the lone school committee member who voted for Dr. Greer is the same person who raised the questions about Greer’s experience in Sharon. Hence that lone vote for Greer was a dummy vote, not unlike what politicians of old practiced when they wanted a bill to pass but having a member who needed cover with their constituents. Again, I politely give you the benefit of the doubt that you have been blinded by your committee’s history of implicit racial bias. However, racism is racism, whether intentional or unintentional. I believe this is a story that the Civil Rights Division of Attorney General Maura Healey’s office would be interested in hearing.

Nevertheless, you still have time to correct your wrong and do the right thing---rescind the selection of Elizabeth Homan, reopen the Search, apologize to the citizens of Arlington then give Dr. Virginia Greer a fair and just hearing which correctly acknowledges her as the most experienced, qualified and best suited finalist to become Arlington’s next Superintendent of Schools.

Respectfully submitted by,

Rev. Mikel E. Satcher, Ph.D.

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 **Mikel Satcher's Letter #2. to Arington School Committee.12.10.20.pdf**
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