

In light of the recent discussions in our community regarding how to structure schools to most adequately serve the needs of our children, we at the South Orange/Maplewood Community Coalition on Race feel it is an appropriate time to re-state and clarify our organization's position on this issue.

In September 2007, our trustees approved and published a paper titled "Five Steps for Superior Schools" which recommend guiding principles for how our schools should operate. We do not take positions on curriculum; rather, the Coalition works to ensure that our community remains racially integrated and truly inclusive. To that end, we drafted the Five Steps which, if taken in totality, would ensure the achievement of what our community desires - an increasingly superior school system.

When taken as a whole, the schools as currently structured and operated do not fully realize the district's goal of having all students achieving at the highest levels of which they are capable. We are not willing to accept that differences in access to various academic resources should be correlated to race. The fact that there are such dramatic differences in academic achievement correlated with race is indicative of a problem. Therefore, it is our position that doing nothing is not an option.

We encourage community members, school administrators, and civic leaders to read the full Five Steps document on our website, www.twotowns.org. The Five Steps are meant to be read as a whole; it is not our intent, and it would be a distortion of the intent of the document, for any single element to be taken out of the context of the rest of the document. The essential principles are that 1. There must be zero tolerance for racial bias 2. All students should have equal and open access to academic resources, including course selection 3. There should be an absolute and unconditional understanding that school is a special place where seriousness of mind, hard work, self-discipline, and respect for others are core values 4. School staff should assert their authority by setting an example for students 5. District governance should focus on accountability.

We feel that the Administration should conduct a fresh evaluation of our schools and governance practices to determine if they truly adhere – in structure and actual practice - to all of the overall principles articulated in the Five Steps. We believe that these Five Steps are vital to achieving a superior school system, and that a superior school system is essential to stable integration in our communities. Therefore, we call for the establishment of a specific plan with corresponding measurable criteria to ensure that these principles are actually being followed, and not merely espoused. We stand ready to work with the school district and the community of Maplewood and South Orange to further these goals.