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Loudoun County School Board, Minority Student Achievement Advisory Committee (MSAAC) Better Together Meeting, Wednesday, January 15, 2025

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Place	Loudoun County Public Schools / School Board meeting (see BoardDocs / LCPS-TV)
Length	24m (video)
- Official meeting video (Vimeo / LCPS-TV): https://player.vimeo.com/video/1047347129?rel=0 - BoardDocs (School Board): https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/loudoun/Board.nsf/Public	

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Speech-to-text: whisper.cpp, model large-v3-turbo. Produced 2026-10-16. Each paragraph starts with its time [HH:MM:SS] in the meeting video.

[00:00:04] Good evening. Appreciate that. Good evening. And welcome to our second annual Better Together Family Dinner, hosted by MSAC and the Division of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility.

[00:00:26] This evening, we have the opportunity to celebrate the beautifully complex tapestry that makes up Loudoun County Public Schools. I invite you to check out the amazing artwork that was submitted by students, as well as their written and their poetic expressions, as well as some essays.

[00:00:44] given the prompt of what makes us better together. When I looked at all of the essays and things like that that were submitted by our students I was so incredibly heartened by the ways in which they look at one another and the support that they offer one another in creating this tapestry that makes up Loudoun County Public Schools. The kids are all right like they are doing the things and they're really excited to be in this space in this place with one another today. I'd like to invite up Dr. Ellis Williams and Ms. Kunkel so that they can tell us a little bit more about what

[00:01:18] we are celebrating on this evening.

[00:01:37] Good evening everyone. For those of you I have not had the opportunity to meet yet and for your first time joining us this evening my name is Erin Kunkel and I serve as the current chair of MSAC.

It's my pleasure and my honor to welcome you to our second annual Better Together Family Dinner and Social. This idea came about in a conversation with Dr. Ellis Williams and her team last year to just have a moment to stop, to just let the world kind of quiet itself around us and to be in a room together with this community, this family that we're really building and just celebrate the things that make us unique, to celebrate our students

[00:02:15] and just to have a moment to just be despite everything that's happening in the world and to just enjoy each other's company, to laugh a little, to have some good food, To catch up on what's been happening in our lives, but just to know that for a little while, for one evening, you're in a place where you're safe, you're welcome, you're affirmed, you're seen, and you're loved.

[00:02:36] And so I'm so happy that we did it again this year. It has shaped up to be my favorite event, my favorite thing that MSAC does, because it's just us and whatever we're talking about, however we're feeling, whatever we're going through. So I encourage you to just relax tonight, sit back, have a good meal, enjoy the conversation.

[00:02:55] Please celebrate these students and their artwork. And again, thank you for coming and sharing your evening with us. Good evening. Dr. Ellis Williams, I'm Assistant Superintendent for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility. I welcome you all. Ms. Kunkel has covered it all, so the only thing I want to say is thank you for coming out.

[00:03:14] When we have times such as we had with four days out of school and sometimes people are wondering whether or not they need to reprioritize their evenings, You could have been anywhere that you needed to be, taking care of the things that you may have not had the opportunity to do so with the inclement weather, but you came here to join us, and for that, we thank you.

[00:03:31] So I'm excited this evening. Our students are everything to us. They are the reason why we get up and do what we do every single day. I know that you feel the same as parents because you are invested in them just like we are. So as we come together this evening, it is very informal. Please take the opportunity to go and meet someone that you may not have had the opportunity to meet or speak to.

[00:03:51] We have members of our administrative team that are joining us this evening. So feel free to make sure that you realize that you are in a space where we all are on one accord, that we are better together. And I say that again, we are better together. The student artwork this year, we did not try to, you know, post up on the walls because we recognized that that was a little difficult last year and that we made it work.

[00:04:15] But we have the running of 30 artists that have been scanned for you to take a look at. Mr. Callaway will share with you the students names. We have our honeybees in the corner who are ready to tell you about their school, the new Henrietta Lacks School, as well as we have an artist featured from Champ High School, and other students will be coming in because we do have to compete with athletics and other opportunities. So with that, I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce our superintendent, Dr. Aaron Spence, who's coming to give us a few words, and he will be here for a little while to be able to socialize

[00:04:51] as well. Dr. Spence? Thank you. Well, good evening. There we go. All right. It's so nice to be here with you all this evening. I do want to acknowledge our school board member, April Chandler, who's here with us this evening as well. Thank you for being here. I love the theme, Better Together.

[00:05:18] Together is our reality. Whether we like it or not, we are always together. It is just a function of whether or not we are better. Oh, I also see we have Dr. Samara Rashid, our other school board member who is here in the room with us this evening. Nice to see you as well. Whether or not we are better together is a choice. And I think there's probably no greater time for us as human beings, as Americans, as members of this school community to really dig into the idea of being better when we are together. And, you know, it is my intention as superintendent to ensure that

[00:05:57] that is a conversation that we have. You heard this is a co-hosted event by MSAC, which is an incredible group. And I'm so appreciative of your efforts to bring us together, but also by the DEIA team. And I just want to sort of mention, first of all, the DEIA team, my immense respect for them and the work that they're doing in our community to bring us together and to make us better, but also just, like, what they mean, because right now there's this conversation happening in the country about whether or not DEI is a good thing, and I want to, like, reflect

[00:06:36] on that with us as we think about what it means to be not just together, but better, because I have this kind of, like, simple theory about DEI. I think it's misunderstood, right? So let's talk about what DEI is, just in definitional terms, like DEI, diversity, is a strength.

[00:06:57] And diversity is our reality. Look around the room. We all come from different places, from different backgrounds, from different perspectives, from different mommies and daddies, from different cultures. And yet here we are together in a room, and that is our reality.

[00:07:16] So, when people say, you know, they question the idea of diversity, I say, look around, diversity is who we are. That is our reality. And then you think about equity, and people say, what does equity mean? And I say, equity is about an outcome. Equity is simply an outcome. And it is the idea that the outcome for all of us when we are together is better.

[00:07:36] It is the idea that each and every one of us has the opportunity to realize who we want to be because we're being given the love and the care and the supports and the opportunities and the access to be the people that we want to be for our young people to be the self-actualized amazing human beings that we know that they can be and that is an outcome but that outcome does not happen without intention and inclusion is simply the intention inclusion is the tool that makes us better together inclusion is a willful and intentional desire to say you are supposed to

[00:08:12] be here we want you here we value and acknowledge your humanity and your dignity and worth as a human being and you're supposed to be here and when you as parents walk into our schools you should feel like you are supposed to be there you should feel welcomed as a member of that school community and as importantly and more importantly perhaps when your children walk into a classroom they should know man this is a place where my teacher loves me this is a place that feels like community this is a place where I'm supposed to be I see myself on the walls and I see myself in

[00:08:51] the hearts and minds of the people around me and I know that the adults care about me and we have leaders we have Lee Boyd one of our great principals in the room we have leaders who embrace that vision and want to build that together with us but that's what it means to be better together, not just together. There's a lot of places you can go where we're together and it doesn't feel that much fun. I have to go to an airport on Friday. We're going to be together and I bet we're not going to be better at the airport. But while we're here in Loudoun County Public Schools, we can be better, but it takes effort. It takes intentional thought to be better.

[00:09:28] It takes a willingness and a desire to be better. And it takes moments like this to be better together it takes groups like MSAC and like our DEIA team and like our school board that's committed to the work of being better for children to make sure that that happens and I just want to say it has been always as an educator my intention and remains my intention and my commitment as the superintendent here now in my second year in Loudoun County to ensure that we always remain better together because there's no greater time for that so thank you so much for being here let's

[00:10:00] celebrate these young people tonight. What a great time. Thank you so much. So I will turn it over to our host, Mr. Everett Calloway, our DEIA specialist. Hello again. Long time no see. I am going to go through some of the names of the students who submitted artwork and their written work to share with us this evening. And then I'm going to ask that they come up and that we're going, we have

[00:10:34] certificates for them as well. Let me get represented in the artwork that is in the

[00:11:17] presentation and within the poems and written work that are in the book. We have work from Belmont Ridge Middle School, Cardinal Ridge Elementary School, Elaine Thompson Elementary School, Freedom High School, Hillside Elementary, Horizon Elementary, John Champ High School, John W. Tolbert Elementary, Legacy Elementary, J. Michael Lunsford Middle School, Morefield Station Elementary School, Pinebrook Elementary School, Stonebridge High School, Stone Hill Middle School, Trailside Middle School, Watson Mountain Middle School, Waxpool Elementary School, and Woodgrove High School.

[00:11:52] We have featured artists Anna Foldesi, Tanei Mistry, Daria Jindal, Vani Shah, Sharon Lee, Layla Terrazas, Rachel Matlock, Clara Doggett, Josiah Powell, Ruby Adepoju, Ireland Randlett,

[00:12:17] Hia Mupiti, Navya Mupiti, Lizzie Madden, Camilla Tejada, Iman Pervais, Akhilin Prasanna, Rahil Harif, Frangiz Afzali, Vashnavi Parimi, Kanak Purohit, Ariana Patel, Ishan Aik, Anaya Mohiden, Jalen Powell, Max Masucci, Olivia Corzo, and Draven Corzo.

[00:12:54] Additionally, we had the opportunity to, a couple weeks ago, go visit one of Loudoun's newest elementary schools, Henrietta Lacks Elementary School. And they had an amazing presentation. If you didn't have the opportunity to go visit it, you truly missed a treat.

[00:13:14] Their students created this amazing booklet, and whenever you get the opportunity, please go check it out. They have students acting as docent to really kind of walk you through the celebration of the history that is associated with that school. and they after we went to visit the school there we reached out to their principal this is super last minute so I really want to acknowledge and thank her so very much uh that we were like this has to be a part of our better together experience because this is exactly what we talk about when we talk about being better together these students did the research they created these um these booklets with that with that information in it they taught the people that came into the school

[00:13:53] And it's so funny, we as adults sometimes have a difficult time talking to someone new. These students, second grade max, came up to each of us, sat us down at a table, and walked us through the story of their school's namesake. So we were like, if you could please reach out to your community and see if this is something that they'd be able to do, that'd be great.

[00:14:14] And when I say that Ms. Boyd showed up and showed out, I really appreciate you. Those students are Arin Bon, Valen Lorenzi, Sarayu Manem, Brynn Roberts, Parazi Rondawa, Isha Rudraju, Jordan Saeed, and Luna Stimson.

[00:14:38] Thank you all so much for that, and we'd like to, at this time, allow you all to eat.

[00:17:13] Hello again. As you all are enjoying your meals and kind of wrapping up, I see some people throwing on those coats trying to transition to the next move. If we could get all of the students who submitted for the Better Together Student Showcase to join us to my right for a quick picture with MSAC and the Division of DEIA. After that, they will touch base with Ms. Frosina to get their certificate, and then you can continue looking at the art, checking out these booklets, if you haven't had an opportunity.

[00:17:48] Each one of these booklets has about 30 different essays and or poems inside of them. We have the photography exhibition over there, and then the booklets from the students at Henrietta Lacks Elementary School. But I just wanted to let you all know that that is what we have left in the program. Then we're going to have Mr. Shaheed Muhammad give us some closing remarks.

[00:18:12] So if all the students who submitted for the showcase could join us to my right, that would be amazing. Inclusive of our honeybees from Henrietta Lacks.

[00:18:40] The photographer corrected me. We're going to go to the back, still to my right, but in the back where the light is a little bit better.

[00:19:10] Hey, everyone. What a great event. We want to thank everybody for being here this evening. I am Shaheed Muhammad. I work with the Division of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility, one of the best divisions in LCPS and just from our the bottom of our hearts we really appreciate the collaboration the work ethic how everything comes together when we partner with MSAC to do

[00:19:45] things like this to navigate the school system to support parents in their journeys advocating for their children it's just so important that we keep these types of partnerships alive so we're very very fortunate to be able to participate with this and we look forward to having more years to come bigger and better as we would like to say as we everything gets better when we're together right before we leave and before you all get on the road because you got the babies you need to

[00:20:20] get them home safely for tomorrow I want to say that we have two incredible leaders who really collaborate well together and set a vision for events like this and the partnership between MSAC and DEIA. And we would be remiss if we did not say thank you and pay some respect and honor

[00:20:45] to Mrs. Kunkel and Dr. Ellis Williams for their leadership. Come on up.

[00:21:12] I know Dr. Ellis Williams is fond of the, she's fond of that pink. You don't, you don't mind. Okay. But we just wanted to show our appreciation for all you do um i have firsthand witness uh you know accounted the hard work that you two put on put together to do this um to bring families together to bring individuals from our school community together on behalf of all students and so we just really like to thank

[00:21:43] you for your hard work and we really really appreciate you so thank you very much thank you to the teams and the collaborating partners. I just want to acknowledge, like, this is all nice, but I couldn't do any of this without my team.

[00:22:04] So I need my team to come up here like you always do, having my back like a black Cadillac. So, and I'm just going to name the thing. I am no better if I didn't have the amazing team that they are my rocks, my confidant.

[00:22:25] They are my doers. They are my, some of you have heard me say tonight, go see so-and-so in a certain color. Make sure you talk to them. They will get it done. And so we definitely have our own mantra because in this work, we recognize the tide of the world in which we're existing in.

[00:22:41] And as we say every day, we play chess, not checkers. So thank you. Well, I would just like to first thank the MSAC Executive Board. I have been very blessed and fortunate to have such great people to work with me.

[00:23:01] My partner in leading the MSAC committee, Trufilia Parker, she works hard. If it was not for her and her community connections, I don't know what we would do because I don't know. I would like to thank our policy lead, Rod Laird-Juleau.

[00:23:18] Rod is behind the scenes, but he gives me homework, and he has made me better as an advocate, as a parent. He has helped me to read things and see things differently, even if I do cheat sometimes and ask my husband to read the legal language for me and tell me, like, I'm five.

[00:23:36] I would like to thank our wonderful secretary, Ikea Pate. She is awesome. She has come in, come on, and if you love the notes that we get and you love the meeting minutes, those are all her doings. She gives great detail. I appreciate it.

[00:23:51] It helps my brain. And in absence, I would like to thank our communications chair, Sheree, but mostly I want to thank MSAC, and I want to thank the entire DEIA team. When I tell you this group is a bunch of rock stars, They are a bunch of rock stars.

[00:24:07] They have taken a mom who didn't know anything under their wing, encouraged me, given me things to think about. I have been in awe of the work that they do for our kids in their schools. I am so grateful that they're here. We all should be so grateful. But mostly I'm grateful for every face in this room for joining us tonight.

[00:24:24] So thank you, enjoy the rest of your evening, and that's it for me.



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