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## STATEMENT

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**BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS - PENNSBURY SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
134 YARDLEY AVENUE • P.O. BOX 338 • FALLSINGTON, PA 19058-0338  
[www.pennsburysd.org](http://www.pennsburysd.org)

TO: THE PENNSBURY COMMUNITY

FROM: CHRISTINE TOY-DRAGONI  
SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT

DATE: MARCH 31, 2021

*The School District's published guidelines for public participation at Board meetings state, "Comments that become personally directed, abusive, obscene, or irrelevant will be ended immediately."*

Recent comments made by a community member at the March 18, 2021 School Board meeting during public comment were abusive and irrelevant to the work taking place in the Pennsbury School District. The comments should have been stopped abruptly by the Board President as the language became both abusive to Black students and community members, as well as irrelevant to any District business. Some of these comments contained micro-aggressions as well as explicitly-racist ideas that connected the Black community to several commonly-held, stereotypical beliefs that are harmful. We believe these comments further illustrate the need to increase cultural proficiency and anti-racist educational practices within our school community. Our students, staff and community need to have the ability to recognize and respond appropriately to acts of bias, hate, and racism.

Furthermore, a recent increase in anti-Asian-American attacks and rhetoric are taking place in communities across the country. As we work to promote a safe, inclusive, and empowering learning environment for all students, it is important to be mindful of how the events taking place in the larger sociopolitical context may impact student interactions and feelings of safety and belonging within our schools.

Freedom of speech and varying viewpoints are acceptable under the Board Policy on public comment; however, these recent comments escalated from expressing a viewpoint to expressing beliefs and ideas that were abusive and coded in racist terms, also known as "dog whistles." Racist dog whistles are seemingly-innocuous speech, often not noticeable to some, but that explicitly communicate a more insidious and abusive message to a subset of the audience. In this case, that would be Black and Brown students and community members.

I sincerely apologize for not muting the commenter in the moment. This has been a lesson for me, as I was caught off guard and didn't act in the best interest of our entire community. I believe this error in judgment was a response to the recent criticism I have received regarding public comment. I let those criticisms cloud my decision making, and

regretted it immediately. The community deserves better, and I resolve to do better. Silence is a form of complicity and I want to make clear that I am not complicit and as such will not be silent. Going forward, I hope that all of us charged with working for our students and community will call out these types of statements or behaviors whenever we see or hear them.

At this time, the inappropriate comments have been edited from the posted recording of the March 18<sup>th</sup> Board meeting. In addition, the Board's response to the offensive comments later in the meeting made clear the importance of anti-racism education and having the knowledge and skills to recognize and respond to implicit or explicit racist behaviors.