

# Black Lives Matter Flag Raising at MHS

Milton High School students, with the full support of the Milton Town School District, are raising the Black Lives Matter flag. The flag signifies our commitment to creating a just, equitable, and empathetic world. It is a symbol of inclusion. Injustice and racism are an ongoing struggle in our nation and our Milton community and continue to traumatize and exclude people of color.

Our purpose as school leaders is to engage our school community in hopes that all will leave with a greater understanding of racial inequity, more specifically its impact throughout Vermont and our country as a whole. The flag will be a reminder that history, including Black history, is not just something of the past. History is constantly being made, and this flag and this movement are a part of it.

## **Statement of Intent from the Students (Milton for Social Justice) on Raising the Black Lives Matter Flag:**

“The Black Lives Matter flag stands for the intervening and protection against violence of people of color. Out of the roughly 500\* students in this school, approximately 30\* of these students are students of color. This flag will represent those who are seen as a minority every day. This flag will show that as a community we accept, appreciate, and welcome them. With this flag we show anyone who wants to be a part of this community is welcome and safe. This flag does not promote any type of violence against anyone. It is only a beacon of light to those that are oppressed.”

-as presented on June 24, 2019 at our MTSD School Board meeting.

\*numbers adjusted to reflect 2019-2020 school year

## **Key Messages:**

- Milton High School students, with the full support of the Milton Town School District (including unanimous approval of the School Board), are raising the Black Lives Matter flag as a symbol of inclusion.
- This student-led initiative ties to the larger educational work of the school district including, but not limited to, (1) our Core Values and Beliefs and (2) Faculty/staff work on equity and anti-bias education and our district's Continuous Improvement Plan goals.
- Similar to the larger work of the school district, student members of the Milton for Social Justice group believe raising the Black Lives Matter flag will inspire a greater understanding of racial inequity and steps we may each take to address that inequity.
- The raising of the Black Lives Matter flag is our kick-off to the 2019-2020 school year. We intend for it to continue a courageous, community-wide conversation about racial inequity which began through the Milton Inclusion and Diversity Initiative and recognize achievements of Black Americans and their contributions to our country.

## **Further Messages:**

- Not all in the local and wider community will agree with this decision.
- We hope our local and wider community will continue/begin to take part in opportunities to engage in respectful, constructive and peaceful dialogues on race.

## **FAQs: Raising the Black Lives Matter Flag at Milton High School**

### **When will the Black Lives Matter flag be raised at Milton High School?**

The flag will be raised on September 4, 2019 after the 6:30 p.m. celebration which begins in the auditorium. The flag will fly until the end of institutional racism. The educational events during the school day are designed for students and staff. The flag raising itself is open to all.

### **How was this decided?**

In the spring of 2018, MHS students collected more than half of the student body's signatures to raise the Black Lives Matter flag. In the 2018- 2019 school year, MHS Students for Social Justice continued to meet to advocate to raise the flag. In the spring of 2019, MHS students began to meet with the superintendent and administration to understand the procedure to raise the flag. The MTSD school board met in the summer of 2019 to create procedures that outlined the process with which to raise a flag. On August 26, 2019 the MTSD School Board voted unanimously to support the raising of the Black Lives Matter flag.

### **Will there be other activities connected to the Black Lives Matter Flag raising?**

Yes, several educational events have been planned.

MHS teachers will continue to meet in cultural proficiency (equity) groups to design activities with and for students at MHS. The Milton for Social Justice group will continue to work with the educational community to develop these activities.

- *Advisory activities designed to raise awareness about equity*
- *Assemblies to share information regarding the flag raising for MHS students and staff*
- *Culturally relevant teaching*

### **Why Black Lives Matter? Don't all lives matter?**

All lives do matter; however, all lives can't matter until Black lives do. Milton for Social Justice students share, "All Lives Matter implies that lives are equally at risk, and they are not. In America, Black lives are undervalued and need to be recognized to bring the inequity to an end."

### **Isn't Black Lives Matter an anti-police group that's disrespectful to law enforcement?**

Black Lives Matter is an internationally recognized network of more than 40 chapters focused on basic human rights and racial equity for people of color.

*The founding of Black Lives Matter in 2013 (by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi) was in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a civilian, who shot and killed unarmed teenager*

*Trayvon Martin. It began as a social protest movement against “the disproportionate impact of state violence on Black Lives” (Black Lives Matter) and has since grown to become an influential force for equity and for the “deactivation of systemic racism” (Black Lives Matter Vermont). Black Lives Matter Vermont identifies as a peaceful, nonviolent movement.*

### **How is this connected to education?**

The work is connected to the District outcomes and goals in the area of equity and other professional development in our school district.

*The work is connected to our district outcomes, which includes the following goals for students before they graduate from high school: (1) Disposition for Lifelong Learning; (2) Personal Development and (3) Citizenship. Students engaged in planning, leading and participation in the events are enhancing skills named in the District’s Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements and Transferable Skills including, but not limited to “expressing themselves creatively and effectively,” “respectfully advocating for self and others” and “supporting, participating, and/or initiating socially responsible actions to benefit the local and global community.”*

*The work is also connected to larger work in our school district including but not limited to culturally sustaining pedagogy and anti-bias education. The Milton School District, as part of the Vermont Agency of Education and public education nationwide, is committed to empowering every student and staff member in our schools to show up as their full selves and see themselves in our curriculum, in our classrooms, in our hallways, in all our school spaces and work.*

### **Shouldn’t schools keep out of politics?**

Raising the Black Lives Matter flag is a civil rights issue.

*Raising the Black Lives Matter flag recognizes the value of Black lives. The United States’ history includes slavery and denial of civil rights to Black citizens, and we continue to address the impact of systemic racism today. Our students, staff and families live in a global society, and issues impacting that society are part of education in our schools. Part of preparing to be a citizen of the world is recognizing where injustice and bias are present. We want classrooms to be places where students engage in dialogues on these difficult topics so that they may be better prepared to advocate for justice. Raising the Black Lives Matter flag brings these educational opportunities to the forefront.*

### **Additional Resources**

- [Raising the Black Lives Matter Flag at MHS](#) (Slide Presentation #1)
- [Raising the Black Lives Matter Flag at MHS](#) (Slide Presentation #2)
- [Letter to MHS Students/Families](#) from Co-Principals, Anne Blake and Mary Jane Stinson
- LCATV [link](#) to MTSD School Board meetings (6/24/19; 7/22/19; 8/12/19; 8/26/19)