



U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division

Employment Litigation Section 4C'DN
950 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20530
www.justice.gov/crt/emp

September 30, 2025

Via Electronic Mail

Interim Superintendent Matthew Smith
Des Moines Public Schools
2100 Fleur Drive
Des Moines, IA 50321
matthew.smith@dmschools.org

Re: Investigation of Employment Practices of Des Moines Public Schools Pursuant to Section 707 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Dear Interim Superintendent Smith:

The Department of Justice (Department) is opening an investigation to determine whether Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS) is engaged in a pattern or practice of discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e, *et seq.* (Title VII). It is the responsibility of the Attorney General of the United States to enforce the provisions of Title VII with respect to state and local government employers. The Attorney General has delegated authority to investigate compliance with these provisions to the Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Rights Division.

Title VII prohibits an employer from discriminating against an individual based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2. When the Attorney General has reasonable cause to believe that a state or local government employer is engaged in a pattern or practice of discrimination in violation of Title VII, it is the Attorney General's responsibility to take appropriate action to eliminate that violation, including presenting the matter to the appropriate court for civil proceedings. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-6(a).

Our investigation is based on information that DMPS may be engaged in employment practices that discriminate against employees, job applicants, and training program participants based on race, color, and national origin in violation of Title VII. DMPS states: "Diversity enriches the climate and strengthens the effectiveness of our schools. . . . We believe it is in the best interests of our school district to develop an employee culture reflective of the greater society."¹

More specifically, DMPS' Board Governance Policies, Section 2.0, "Board's Guardrails for the Superintendent," provides that "[t]he Superintendent shall not allow the composition of the teaching and learning staff to diverge regarding demographics and cultural responsiveness, from the student population while utilizing hiring practices conducted in accordance with the District's Affirmative Action Plan and Equal Employment Opportunity/Non-Discrimination Process."²

¹ Equity at DMPS, Des Moines Public Schools, <https://perma.cc/11YN5-UEHD>.

² Board Governance Policies 2.0, Des Moines Public Schools, at para. 3, <https://perma.cc/Z5QJ-Q6Y11>.

DMPS' 2021 Affirmative Action Plan includes race- and color-based teacher recruitment goals to "increase the number of teachers of color" in kindergarten and first grade by 8% and second through fifth grades by 5%.³ The DMPS "Strategic Plan" also details DMPS' staff retention strategy under Priority #3, Strategic Objective #1, which includes the following action items:

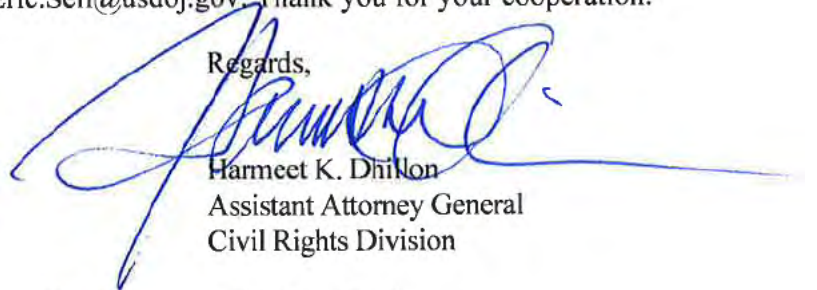
- Review and revise how we place our teachers and leaders of color.
- Maintain and grow affinity spaces.
- Create a feedback plan to lift up voices of our People of Color to identify key areas of strength and improvement.
- Create a focus group to analyze the data from feedback to make recommendations on systemic changes needed to create a safer environment for People of Color.⁴

To further these goals, Des Moines created the 3D Coalition project with area universities⁵ "to identify aspiring minority teachers and guide them through the postsecondary education needed to teach in Des Moines."⁶ DMPS guarantees that 3D Coalition participants who complete 3D Coalition programming will receive an interview to become a teacher at DMPS.⁷ After DMPS recruits a minority teacher through the 3D Coalition program, the minority teacher is "required to work in the Des Moines school system for the same length of time they received support from the 3D Coalition."⁸

Accordingly, I have authorized a full investigation to determine whether DMPS is engaged in a pattern or practice of discrimination as set forth above. We have not reached any conclusions about the subject matter of the investigation. We intend to consider all relevant information, and we welcome your assistance in helping to identify what that might be.

I have assigned Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Eric Sell to this investigation. Mr. Sell will be in contact with you shortly to set up a mutually agreeable date and time to discuss the parameters of this investigation, including the scope of information that we will be seeking from you. He may be reached by email at Eric.Sell@usdoj.gov. Thank you for your cooperation.

Regards,



Harmeet K. Dhillon
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division

cc: Brandon T. Wroblewski, Trial Attorney, Employment Litigation Section
Andrew Kahl, Civil Chief, U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Iowa

³ 2021 Affirmative Action Program, Des Moines Public Schools, at 7-8, <https://perma.cc/D47H-ELW3>.

⁴ Cultivating Success, Priority #3, Des Moines Public Schools, <https://perma.cc/G3UB-FUV6>.

⁵ 3D Coalition Project, Des Moines Public Schools, <https://perma.cc/PUN2-EXKZ>.

⁶ DMPS, Drake, DMACC Forming the 3D Coalition to Identify, Education and Hire More Minority Teachers, Des Moines Public Schools, <https://perma.cc/G3NF-6BE6>.

⁷ 3D Coalition Project, *supra* n.5.

⁸ Forming the 3D Coalition, *supra* n.6.