



The Berkshire Eagle ⁽¹⁾

Main menu

Jason McCandless: Due credit on black history class

Posted Tuesday, February 26, 2019 3:24 pm

By Jason McCandless

PITTSFIELD — Like most human beings, I enjoy getting kudos and pats on the back, and it is always gratifying when these praises take the form of something public such as The Eagle editorial of Tuesday regarding adding a black history curriculum to the Pittsfield Public Schools range of high school offerings. One of my heroes, President Harry Truman, said that, "It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit." I try to live this in my work as an educator and leader.

Most of the time, the superintendent gets the credit because they are the face of the district and have the title, but often (very often) the real genesis of the idea and the rolled-up-sleeves behind the work are where the real credit lies. The most crucial role I play in most successes my schools and districts have enjoyed is through listening to people and saying yes when great ideas are before me.

In this case the real credit, as usual, lies elsewhere than with the superintendent. It lies with several individuals who have helped me come to understand how vital cultural competence is in any community, and understand the vital importance of Pittsfield becoming a more culturally competent and inclusive community. More specifically and germane to the editorial is the work of Berkshire Interfaith Organizing, which stuck with this request and continued to lend their ears and hearts to me, even when it was clear to them that this request was on its surface one more thing to crowd onto an already overflowing plate for teachers, principals and district administrators.

Credit goes to Ms. Mabel Hamilton and to Ms. Wes Gadson for their persistence, patience, and offer to help actually make these courses happen. The credit moving forward will belong to the Pittsfield School Committee for its work in approving these courses, and to the educators who will take this idea and translate it into actionable learning opportunities for students of every race. I am grateful to the students who will take this class and expand the depth of their knowledge about themselves, their neighbors near and far, and our shared place in the world.

As the father of two K-12 Pittsfield graduates now in college and of one Pittsfield High sophomore, I know the power and promise of having one's children attend diverse schools where they learn firsthand that wonderful people and friends come in every way imaginable. My wife and I know the power of sending children off into a wider world well prepared for the reality that not everyone is just like them, and that this is a gift, not something to be feared or shied away from. I am grateful for the leaders, teachers, community members and others who help support this important real-world learning experience.

RACE-LEADERSHIP PRECEPTS

As a white leader in an increasingly diverse community I live and lead by several precepts that I have encapsulated here. This list seems simple, perhaps overly simple, but it serves as a start and a launching pad for the trajectory our community deserves in terms of race-leadership:

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER THESE ADS



1. Be honest with yourself about your own biases, the reality and toxicity of institutional racism, and the role that white privilege plays in every aspect of life.
2. Be brave. As Melody Hopson, president of Ariel Investments, says, "We can not afford to be color blind. We have to be color brave." Hard, uncomfortable conversations with one's self and with others is part of the work.
3. Stop being complicit in actions, systems, and attitudes that serve to lessen others.
4. Start being culturally competent as an individual and as community member, employee, leader, or in whatever capacity you live and serve your neighbors.
5. Say yes when opportunities to be better, do better, and lead better are presented. Say yes when investments can be made to increase cultural competence. Say yes when opportunities to collaborate and celebrate are offered.

Thank you to Berkshire Interfaith Organizing and to Ms. Hamilton and Ms. Gadson. Thank you to countless neighbors here in Pittsfield, in Lee, in the county, and across the Commonwealth who have helped me better understand the role of a district leader in building a more equitable and just community. Thank you to our elected school committee and Mayor Tyer for being well ahead of their superintendent and for their constant support of all students and families, and to creating a more level playing field for all students.

We may be limited in our individual power to undo centuries of hate, of terror, of purposeful efforts to define and dishonor "the other" and the "lesser." However, as efforts like Berkshire Interfaith Organizing show us, as the efforts of educators in every school building in the Berkshires show us, as the foundational work of groups like Multicultural Bridge, the NAACP, and the Anti-Defamation League show us, as the work of the Berkshire Immigrant Center shows us, as the courage of students across the county, Commonwealth, and nation show us, together we can do more, be more, and create a richer community for every one of our neighbors.

Jason McCandless is Pittsfield superintendent of schools.

Tweet

Share 2

Share

TALK TO US

If you'd like to leave a comment (or a tip or a question) about this story with the editors, please email us (<mailto:news@berkshireeagle.com>). We also welcome letters to the editor for publication; you can do that by filling out our letters form (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSebsleaANReD7JSKRQ_UZaBy8p6LM0bDwZr-AllId8q6XtY_w/viewform) and submitting it to the newsroom.

OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY INTEREST YOU

- Letter: Affordable housing story needed context** (</stories/letter-affordable-housing-story-needed-context,588908>)
- Letter: Don't buy watered down 'Medicare for all'** (</stories/letter-dont-buy-watered-down-medicare-for-all,588806>)
- Letter: Lions made right call on circus** (</stories/letter-lions-made-right-call-on-circus,588708>)
- Letter: Eagle participates in high-tech lynching** (</stories/letter-eagle-participates-in-high-tech-lynching,588616>)

From the Web

Ads by Revcontent

This Pot Stock Could Be Like Buying Amazon for \$3.19
The Motley Fool

Feeling Old? Do This Once A Day and Watch What Happens
LCR Health

11 Cancer Symptoms You Are Probably Ignoring
Poplively

If You Have Diabetes, Do This Now (Watch Video)
Allied Naturals