

November 10, 2016

An open letter to the Osseo Area Schools community

On November 9, at Maple Grove Senior High School, despicable racial slurs were written inside a bathroom. Thankfully, the graffiti was reported to the building principal but not before it was widely shared on social media. [Read the message that Principal Bart Becker sent to MGSB families.](#) There will be a thorough school investigation of this incident, and a report has been made to the Maple Grove Police Department, which has taken the lead on the investigation. Dr. Becker is also working with student leaders and staff to identify next steps as a school community. We know that student voice will be our most important asset as we move forward.

While this incident happened at one of our schools, it impacts all of us as a school community. Many parents and community members have contacted me, seeking reassurance that we are taking action to provide safe and respectful learning environments; they also want to learn about steps we are taking to disrupt racism.

Schools are microcosms of their communities, where racism and racist acts take place both visibly and invisibly. So, why a message from me about this particular event? This incident has occurred at a unique time in our nation's and school district's history. Certainly, issues of race are prominent in our state's and nation's public discourse, particularly in recent months and including the campaign season. Locally, our district has been engaged in racial equity work for several years, which has led us to be as prepared as we've ever been to engage fully in this conversation for the benefit of students.

Here's what we're doing

The focus of the racial equity work in our school district has been three-fold: 1) to provide common language skills and communication tools to help us engage in conversations about race; 2) to uncover personal racial bias that could have unintended impact on our interactions with students and families; and 3) to interrupt institutional practices that are obstacles for our students in reaching their full potential.

Key components of that work include:

- **Securing a commitment at the highest level of the organization.** Our school board has approved a [strategic plan that includes multiple areas of priority work around racial equity](#), including using culturally responsive instruction; disrupting patterns of racial disproportionality; helping employees identify and respond to the influence of race and culture on learning; and developing a more racially diverse workforce.
- **Equipping employees to engage in productive and respectful conversations about race.** More than 1,000 employees have completed our foundational level of racial equity training, and many have taken advanced training.

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This foundational training provides language and communication tools that help staff engage, sustain and deepen conversations about race. These conversations are essential in order to eliminate the gaps that exist in achievement between our white students and our students of color. We must also eliminate the over-representation of students of color in both discipline and identification for special education services. To assist in this work, equity teams exist at every school and at the district office.

- **Building relationships with community partners to provide safe and respectful work and learning environments, and to engage in deeper conversations about race.** We're currently working with multiple partners on our 4th annual "It's Time to Talk about Race" event next March (see below). We also have partnerships with the cities of Brooklyn Park and Maple Grove, which provide school resource officers to our schools. School resource officers play a critical role in developing positive relationships with our students and helping keep schools safe, respectful and secure.
- **Taking decisive action and sustaining those efforts over time.** Disrupting systemic racism requires decisive action. Over the past few years, it has required new and different work at the school level and at the district level. Our school board, for example, will be taking action later this month on a new equity policy that has been in development for many months and will guide our efforts for years to come. This work also requires the courage and commitment of an entire school community to sustain the work over time.

Here's how you can learn more about the school district's racial equity work

- Read the [Osseo Area Schools Strategic Plan](#) to see how we isolate race in specific priority work.
- Plan to attend our 4th annual "It's Time to Talk about Race" event on Saturday, March 11. Registration information for that event will be posted on the district website, www.district279.org, after January 1. Our partners in this event are the City of Brooklyn Park, City of Maple Grove, Osseo Area Schools, African Immigrant Services, Joint Community Police Partnership, St. Joseph the Worker, and the Northwest Suburban Integration School District.
- Attend or listen to the audio recording of the school board work session on February 7, 2017 to learn more about our racial equity priority work.
- Ask your school principal about what's happening at your school.

Finally, I want to share my personal commitment.

I want you to know that in every school and in every classroom, our staff is focused on helping each student feel safe, respected and welcome at school. While I am horrified by yesterday's incident, I am determined to continue our work to create safe and respectful school communities where we can have productive conversations about race and honor multiple perspectives. I know that we have much to learn and much to do. I want to assure you that we will persist in our work for racial equity, and we will continue engaging in conversations about race and the devastating impact of racism in our nation, our communities and our schools.

Respectfully,



Kate Maguire, Ed.D.
Superintendent