

Hello and welcome to February!

It is hard to believe how fast January flew by. For those inclined to believe a groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow which means 6 more weeks of winter, however I did read he's only correct 40% of the time. February also signifies the midway point of the school year! We are approximately halfway there, which for me creates a time for reflection.

I looked back to an email I sent out October 29 that raised the question "*What do we stand for?*" In that email, I describe the sense of loss, frustration, change, and divineness that are pervasive in our country and community at this time. I talked about the concepts of **belonging** and **dignity** as the keys to successful re-engagement in school and the driving forces for us to continue to work towards our mission of *Ensuring the Success of ALL Students*.

In mid-November the unprecedented floods created even more chaos for our community. Instead of giving in, our community united in our support for those impacted. Strangers and neighbors alike were working together to help those in need. It was inspirational and a testament to how wonderful this community truly is, as our actions confirmed the sense of **dignity** we should all be treated with, and that everyone **belongs** right where they are!

As we have tried to get back to some consistency in schools to start the new year, however, other issues have popped back up to rear their ugliness. Over the last month I have had personal conversations with families sharing their experiences with bullying, cyber-bullying, and harassment. We had community members comment at our last board meeting on their concerns about bullying and inappropriate use of phones/social media. I have also had conversations relating to hateful comments directed towards their child's race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender expression.

If our children are truly going to be able to reach their ultimate goals, to experience the success we dream for them, they must be able to show up as themselves and be treated with the **dignity** they inherently deserve. It is through our words and actions to tell and show each student whether they truly belong or not. We are working hard on this in our schools, but even as we focus on this, comments are still made, feelings are hurt, and individuals are offended. These dignity violations do not mean we have bad kids or bad families or a bad community. But we must not excuse these comments away. We must address them, ensure relationships are restored properly and grow.

To this end, our schools and community must be fully inclusive. We believe everyone belongs to Pioneer Nation. We will not tolerate hurtful comments that lead to bullying and cyber-bullying, or hateful comments based on race, sexual orientation, gender expression, or any other perceived 'difference'.

My email in October was meant to paint a picture of what we are working towards. This email is call to action to ensure we achieve our goals. We will continue to develop a sense of **belonging** through a culture of **dignity** in our schools. I ask each of you to discuss this with your children. It will take both the schools and the community to get where we want to go.

With gratitude,

Matt