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January Message On Dignity From Superintendent Rundle

1 message

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Fred Rundle, Ed.D, Superintendent

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Dear Mercer Island Students, Staff, Families, and Community,

Privilege has become an increasingly divisive term, especially when used to describe certain unearned advantages afforded to some based on identities such as race, gender, and class. I have received criticism for acknowledging the way my own privilege as a white, able minded, able bodied, male played a role in my career trajectory. A community member delivered me a letter after reading an email I sent leading up to Black History Month a couple of years ago. In short, the person objected to the idea of privilege and asked me to consider whether this was the right place to work if I am so concerned with my white identity. We may not all agree on whether privilege matters or influences our participation in the world around us, but let me set aside this debate for a different time and instead consider that everyone in our classrooms, schools, and community should have the privilege of *dignity*.

I invite you to join me in making dignity the theme for 2023. You might have heard MISD staff or me talking about [Dr. Tammy Campbell's](#) 4Bs- Belonging, Belief, Barriers, and Broadcast. All four of these commitments to ensuring the very best education for all MISD students provide the underpinnings of dignity, but none more so than belonging.

We are not there yet, but MISD is committed to ensuring that each student, staff member, and community member feels a deep sense of belonging as their whole-authentic self in our schools. [John Krownapple and Floyd Cobb](#) argue that when people do not feel they belong they underperform and cope with the feeling of being an outsider in ways that include but are not limited to dropping out, expressing frustration through violence, developing thoughts of self-harm, and succumbing to anxiety and depression. My older brother, mentor, and phenomenal educational leader in his own right summed it up to me this way, "Freddie, kids who feel right will act right." When we feel we belong we positively contribute to the common good. And in her book, [Leading with Dignity](#), Donna Hicks (2018) sews together the interconnectedness between dignity and belonging, "When people feel that their value and worth are recognized in relationships, they experience a sense of well-being that enables them to grow and flourish." The dignity of our students and sense of belonging everyone feels will be central in our schools in 2023.

Hicks (2018) provides a blueprint to making dignity intentional:

1. **Accept** others as their authentic self and expressed identity;
2. **Recognize** others and their contributions;
3. **Acknowledge** others by listening actively and validating their concerns and ideas;
4. **Include** everyone;
5. Ensure the physical and psychological **safety** of others;
6. Treat others **justly**;
7. Preserve the **independence** of others and their ability to make decisions in their best interest;
8. Prioritize **understanding** others;
9. Give others the **benefit of the doubt**; and
10. Take **accountability** for your own actions and apologize when you violate others.

In other words, in 2023, let's all be kind to one other, make sure everyone belongs, and uphold the dignity of others. During the week of January 23-27, we will join millions of others in participating in [The Great Kindness Challenge](#), an entire week focused on just being kind for the sake of kindness itself.

We can further take a cue from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whom we will honor on Monday, January 16. He once said, "I want to suggest some of the things that should begin your life's blueprint. Number one...should be a deep belief in your own dignity. Your worth and your own somebodiness...Always feel that you count. Always feel that you have worth, and always feel that your life has ultimate significance." I hope we can not only remember this for ourselves but secure it for our students, staff, parents, and neighbors as well.

In addition to Dr. King's birthday, January is also Whole Child Month. Among one of [MISD's four core values](#) is support for the whole child. The concept of a whole child approach to education is frequently misunderstood and misplaced at the center of the debate between academic excellence and social emotional learning. As I have been sharing this fall in several venues, academic excellence and the social and emotional wellbeing of our students is a both/and conversation not an ideological battleground. Educating the whole child, backed up by the [Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development \(ASCD\)](#), is achieved when five tenants are upheld:

1. Each student is **challenged** academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment;
2. Each student enters school **healthy** and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle;
3. Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally **safe** for students and adults;
4. Each student is actively **engaged** in learning and is connected to the school and broader community;
and
5. Each student has access to personalized learning and is **supported** by qualified, caring adults.

So, I welcome 2023 with the personal commitment to lead our school district and inspire others to join me in the pursuit of an educational experience and schools that promote the whole child, model kindness, promote unequivocal belonging for all, and relentlessly commit to the untethered privilege of human dignity.

Happy New Year,

Fred Rundle

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