

February 21, 2022

Dear Manhasset School Community,

Just prior to the February break, we had two incidents that have caused great concern in our school community. Importantly, we do not believe that these incidents are related to one another. However, we do believe it is essential to share these incidents with the broader school community in an effort to promote a conversation about who we are, what we value, and what we stand for.

It was brought to our attention that an outside group of individuals, that are not Manhasset residents, attended our last Board of Education meeting on Thursday, February 17. One individual, who appears to promote himself as a spokesperson for the group, produced a video that is openly posted on YouTube and Facebook in which he makes disparaging remarks about the transgender community.

Among the most challenging issues facing transgender students and staff is the use of gender specific restrooms. Like all public schools in New York State, our schools have designated single stall restrooms as gender neutral. In his video, this individual took issue with, belittled, and mocked this designation. The District finds these remarks to be ill-informed and reprehensible. Our District is committed to ensuring that all children feel valued and accepted for who they are. We unequivocally support our LGBTQ students, employees, and their families.

The second unrelated incident was discovered on Friday, February 18, 2022. Our Buildings and Grounds staff discovered graffiti spray painted on the field behind Shelter Rock Elementary School. The graffiti included an unacceptable racial slur, inappropriate language, and an inappropriate drawing. We do not believe that the graffiti was viewed by students as this area is not currently being used for recess or any outdoor events. The graffiti was immediately removed prior to the start of school on Friday morning, and we promptly reported this to the Nassau County Police Department. The District strongly condemns the defacing of school property and finds the use of racial slurs to be abhorrent.

Our District and the entire Board of Education have always been committed to creating a safe and inclusive learning environment. The incidents described above are not only upsetting but are also extremely divisive. We do not believe they are reflective of who we are as a school community. Our schools are microcosms of society. The children that we serve come from diverse backgrounds with diverse experiences, and our differences have always been a source of strength. We recognize that it is important to help students be comfortable with who they are. We also recognize that understanding our differences helps us to develop empathy while avoiding prejudices and stereotypes. This is the foundation for helping our students to become compassionate adults.

We once again thank our community for your continued partnership as we continue our work in developing learning environments in which we treat each other with dignity, courtesy, and respect.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gaurav Passi
Acting Superintendent of Schools

Patricia Aitken
Christine Monterosso
Jill Pullano
Erin Royce
Regina Rule
Board of Education, Manhasset Public Schools