December 17, 2021

Diversity and Equity in Blind Brook

Dear Members of the Blind Brook Community,

Last summer, in response to national events, and led by inspiring examples from our student and community leaders, the Board of Education announced that our District would form a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee. Over the next few months, we began to take steps to identify and address issues of equity and discrimination in our schools. We held town hall sessions with parents, students, teachers and alumni to gather feedback on their experiences. Guided by feedback from our Student Congress and other leaders, our administrators and teachers looked for opportunities to introduce underrepresented voices into our curriculum. Our building leaders have worked with community members to feature cultural celebrations and customs that reflect the growing diversity of our student population.

Despite our best intentions, getting this vital committee formed, up and running has been slowed due to COVID, construction and changes in administration. But two recent events that impacted our students underscore that our District must work harder to confront intolerance and discrimination:

First, at a recent playoff soccer game, players from another school allegedly directed anti-Semitic slurs at our students and their families. This incident was investigated with the support of myself, the other school’s superintendent and our respective athletic directors. We have also been working with the Anti-Defamation League, both to ensure that the situation was properly addressed, and to develop a plan to identify and proactively prevent such issues from recurring.

Second, it was brought to my attention that a District staff member used inappropriately discriminatory language as part of a lesson that upset students and staff members. The District and the Board of Education take claims of discrimination very seriously. I want to assure you that thorough investigations are ongoing, and if warranted, appropriate disciplinary measures will be taken. Dr. Chirles will be sending a follow-up communication with more information.

These recent events are a wake-up call that much work remains to be done. No child, parent or District employee should be ever made to feel excluded based on their heritage, their culture, or their beliefs. We will not tolerate hatred being directed at our students from outside, and we must confront it directly when we find it within our own buildings.
We will ensure that this vital committee continues to take shape, as it will be the guiding force in reviewing current practices and making recommendations for improvements. Before the holiday break, we will send additional information regarding volunteering for this committee to the community. Representatives from all constituent groups will be selected so that all voices are heard.

We will continue our commitment to providing education in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion. The District, in conjunction with the committee, will develop training sessions in these areas for both staff and students. These sessions will focus on raising awareness of issues of bias and lack of equity in the school climate. Experts in these areas will be brought in to share their insights and input from the community will be gathered to make sure that all concerns are addressed.

There will also be a review of District policy with an eye towards DEI initiatives. The community will have an opportunity to be part of these discussions during Board meetings and public forums on this topic.

Discrimination and exclusion in any form need to be exposed and eliminated in our school district. I look forward to working with everyone to provide a more welcoming and inclusive school district for all members of our community.

Sincerely,

Dr. Colin M. Byrne